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The Story of Philip Methuen.

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THE STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN

BY ✓

MRS. J. H. NEEDELL

AUTHOR OF STEPHEN ELLICOTT'S DAUGHTER, ETC.



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THE STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN.

CHAPTER I.

"O Florence, with thy Tuscan fields and hills,
Thy famous Arno, fed with all the rills,
Thou brightest star of star-bright Italy."

"Born into life! who lists
May what is false hold dear,
And for himself makes mists
Through which to see less clear;
The world is what it is for all our dust and din."
—M. ARNOLD.

THE scene is Florence, the month May, and the time some two hours after sunrise. Already the city is astir, and the country people are trooping in and will soon be setting forth their fragrant wares in the market-place. Eggs in pyramids, of every shade of color, from pure white to softest brown and palest green; curd cheeses, round and smooth, and stacked like cannon-balls, with little twigs of the still tender chestnut-trees, fresh picked in the dewy dawn, thrust into the interstices.

The time for ripe fruits is not come yet; the gourds and pomegranates are hanging crude and colorless on their parent stems, and the neutral-tinted berries of the grape scarcely show beneath the full spring leafage of the vines. But color is not wanting: tall arum lilies stand in stately ranks, while masses of gladiola, cyclamen, violets, and the bearded hyacinth are lying about in heaps, soon to be divided by swift fingers into posies, when they will overflow the market-place and be exposed upon the old gray basements of the city's palaces, to tempt the eye of the English and American stranger. While the patient mules are being unladen, and the baskets unpacked, the voices of girls and women, with a sprinkling of men among them, rise clear and resonant in the delicious morning air; if the joke be rough or the speech sharp, it comes softened and rounded in the

mellow Tuscan *patois*; and a glance at their lithe forms and bold and vivid faces shows where Michael Angelo got his models and Savonarola his eager followers.

But let us leave the market, and, ascending the left bank of the river toward the Uffizi, stand still for a moment and look around at perhaps the fairest sight under heaven. Domes and spires fill the smokeless air, which, of necessity, are of carven stone; but where else is stone carved and shaped into leafage and loveliness so delicate and ethereal? Look at the finely-fretted parapet of Or San Michele, lifting its sharp outlines above the dim, tortuous streets which inclose it; while the huge church itself, square-set like a fortress, uprears its bulk against the clouds with a mountainous majesty which seems to make it more akin to nature than to the work of man. And then by a little change of position you will be able to catch a glimpse of the Campanile of Giotto, more than five centuries old, but looking to-day, as has been charmingly said, "as fair and fresh in its perfect grace as if angels had built it in the night just past."

But detail and panegyric are out of place where every church exhibits or encloses the supreme efforts and triumphs of genius, to be only outdone by the treasures stored in the noble palaces themselves; and the whole is pitched in the midst of cypress groves, olive slopes, and gardens flooded with sunshine and alight with changeful color, while the yellow Arno rolls through the fertile valley and the distant Apennines shut in the picture.

On the morning with which we have to do, a man has just pushed open the window of a room in one of the irregular picturesque houses on the Lung' Arno, and stepping out on the balcony which projects over the full-flowing stream below, leans heavily over the rail and gazes out at the scene before him. He is intimately acquainted with the city on which his eyes rest, so as to be able to fill in from memory every point where vision fails. He can even recall the harmonious tints and weather-stains of certain old frescoes on the wall in a far-away street, or some grotesque bas-relief on a crumbling lintel; he can see the dusky interior of some forge or trader's stall, which he will never pass again, or that of some stately church where the vast roof tapers up to a shimmering point of light, and through the issue of the half-open doors the baked pavement of the piazza gleams white and dazzling outside. At this very mo-

ment color and light, sunshine and warmth, steep the whole world beyond his window: the pulse of life seems almost audible to listening ears.

The senses of this man, Lewis Trevelyan, who was gazing and listening, were almost preternaturally acute, for protracted disease had worn to tenuity the carnal elements of his body, and wrought upon nerves and brain till the highest point of tension and exasperation had been reached. He was quite aware that almost to the last the sands in his hour-glass were run, and that probably he would never be able to repeat the effort which had enabled him to reach the outside balcony of his room. Even now his strength was so far failing him as to make it difficult for him to retain his grasp upon the parapet; and a pang of mixed fear and humiliation had struck across his heart when he became aware of an opening door and footsteps in the room behind him, and the next moment a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a strong arm caught and propped his staggering figure.

"You here!" he gasped, looking up into the face bent anxiously over him—"you here! What can have drawn you forth from St. Sulpice? I never expected to see your face again."

"Wait a moment till you have recovered yourself a little, and I will explain."

It would not have been difficult for Philip Methuen to have raised the sick man in his arms and carried him back to the couch he had quitted, but he refrained, from a quick perception that such an action would have hurt the pride of the other, and contented himself with helping his painfully slow and difficult progress back to his former place and position.

When he had arranged his pillows, and given him a few drops of wine from a bottle of Johannisberger which stood on a little table close at hand, he drew a chair to the sofa and sat down beside his friend.

He had brought in with him from the market a bunch of roses and a fragrant sheaf of lilies of the valley, which he had flung down in his haste to help Trevelyan, and a little rough terra-cotta pot full of ripe strawberries.

"I see—you have not forgotten," said Trevelyan, who had rallied a little by this time; "but the child is not here. I have sent her back again to Fiesole; what could a dying man do with her?"

Then after a pause, during which the young man re-

garded him with grave, compassionate eyes: "You came in the nick of time to save me from the death of a dog; had I dropped on those stones I should never have risen again. Conceive my lying there in the eye of the sun till old Assunta had come in to discuss my superfluous dinner, or perhaps Richetti himself, bent on repeating the plausible falsehoods to which my ears had at last grown deaf! At last! it has been a long process, Philip."

Methuen's face was clouded and distressed, but he seemed to find it hard to answer. The other observed him with a keenness which weakness seemed scarcely to obscure, and smiled as if amused.

"Come," he continued, "say what is in your heart if it will make it lighter. Repeat the old formulas—my friendship will stand the strain. I have found life a bad business—a hard struggle, with the certainty of being vanquished in the end. Is not that the gospel according to Schopenhauer, and which I have proved and practised? You believe in God and a future life—in his goodness and management of affairs. If there were one, I would thank him that he has given me courage enough, in the thick of my miseries and disappointments, to reject consolations to which the whole universe gives the lie!"

He spoke eagerly, in spite of pain and breathlessness: his was a temperament which would never grow cold till the hand of death quenched its ardors. It seemed to Philip that he rather desired to believe what he asserted than believed it.

"Are we able to pronounce on the whole universe?" he answered. "Is not doubt a shade better than despair?"

Again the kind, cynical smile played round Trevelyan's pale lips.

"I know you have the courage of your opinions, Methuen, and only spare me controversy and exhortation out of pity for my condition. But the time is gone by for that. I never hoped to have the chance of talking about my affairs to you again, and must make the best of it. But first, what has happened? How comes it that that tawny poll of yours is not yet disfigured by the tonsure? If you had come back a full-blown priest, I am not sure I should have refused to make my confession, and received the sacred wafer at your hands. It would have done me no harm, and given you an innocent satisfaction."

"All that is postponed. I have consented, if not to give up my vocation, at least to consider about giving it up."

Trevelyan stared at him in blank astonishment.

"I thought nothing more could surprise me, but this does. Come, Methuen, I see the matter goes hard with you, but there need be no hesitation in making confidences to a dying man. Has your faith got a shock? No: it was too inveterate for fact or reason to shake it. Has the Abbé de Sève made some requisition beyond even your fanaticism to meet, or the world-wise archbishop himself opposed your singular predilection for martyrdom among the unsavory savages of the Corea? Anyway, it is a satisfaction I never bargained for. May I wish you joy?"

"As you like; only bear in mind I have received the hardest blow fate could well have dealt me—that the deliberate plan of my life is upset. Try and understand what it is to have been on the point of consecration to a work you believed the best on earth, and to find yourself suddenly pulled back and forced to face the other way—a way you dislike and condemn."

"Ah, I begin to see daylight! Some stroke of good fortune has occurred to you, and your mother, like a sensible woman as she is, has put her veto on the priesthood."

"You are right in a way. My cousin is dead on the very eve of his wedding-day, and my uncle writes to urge—to command me to——" he hesitated.

"To raise up seed unto your cousin! Is it part of the compact to take the widowed bride, or will a free choice be allowed you? In that case I shall put in a claim for my little gypsy. Forgive me, Philip, but I shall go down to the grave better content that you are compelled to play a man's part in life. Priests don't count as men."

Methuen smiled.

"I should have supposed a disciple of Schopenhauer would have deplored the probability of adding to the unredeemed sum of human misery, but there is but one logical faith. At least you now understand how the case stands with me, and we can talk of other things. You are much weaker, Trevelyan, than I expected to find you. Tell me anything you wish that it is in my power to do. I start for England to-day to be in time for poor Mark's funeral."

"Then you must come back," was the eager rejoinder. "I have not a single friend in Florence, nor outside of it, for that matter. I look to you, Philip, to see me put under ground, with decency at least, and to wind up my affairs. There is but a couple of hundreds lying at the bank here to my credit, which will be enough for such meagre funeral rites as I desire, and for the few debts I leave behind. Should there be any surplus, well—that will be my daughter's fortune!" He spoke with concentrated bitterness, and added: "Advise me what I am to do with the pauper!"

"You have positively no relations who would be her natural guardians?"

"Yes. I have a sister married to a parson in Sir Giles Methuen's own parish; but they are poor, and she hates me. I am talking against my strength, but must explain—if I can. Mine was not a good youth, Philip, and my early follies helped to ruin her prospects. Her dowry was swallowed up in the payment of debts it would have been a shame to have left unpaid. *Noblesse oblige*, and we were an honorable family, though a very impoverished one. Through this the man of her choice threw her over, and she has always visited his sins, as well as my own, on my head, in spite of my endeavor to convince her that it was a stroke of good luck that she found him out this side of matrimony. She says also that I broke my father's heart. She would turn my miserable little girl out of doors."

There was an awkward pause, then Trevelyan spoke again:

"I have thought of your mother, Philip. Ah, I see; that, too, is a forlorn-hope! Let it be as if I had not spoken. The little minx has the gift of alienating goodwill."

"It is not that," said the other quickly; "but my mother has no love for children. I often think she barely tolerates her son. But if your sister is married to the vicar of Skeffington, my task is easy. I will go to her before I see you again. I cannot believe that it will be difficult to arrange matters."

"That means you will offer to pay her handsomely for the girl's board, lodging, and education; but I would not trust her even then. Moreover, it strikes me you are reckoning without your host. I know your yearly income, my dear fellow—what the mother disburses

(pardon me), and on what the son subsists, charities inclusive. No doubt the old baronet will increase your allowance, now you are become heir-presumptive, but only on condition that you show yourself accommodating. It will not be wise or well for you to burden yourself with the charge of a young woman on first starting in life. You are now, remember, one of the laity."

"A young woman!" repeated Methuen, smiling.

"That is what it is her misfortune to become, unless we could both go under ground together, which would be the best solution of the difficulty. I would not own to any one but you how anxious I am about the girl's future, with her promise of beauty, her strong will and vehement temper." He sighed impatiently. "I wish she had never been born! How can I die in peace, leaving that miserable little waif afloat on life's current?"

Methuen got up and looked at his watch.

"It grieves me to say I must go, but a week hence we will talk this matter over again. You may rest assured that I will see your sister, and bring back good news to you."

He held the frail hand of the sick man closely but gently grasped, and looked down at him with an expression of such compassionate sympathy as to bring the tears to his eyes.

"You must live till I come back," he added, "by God's grace or force of will. I will write to you at every chance till I stand here by your side again. *Addio, a riverderci!*"

As he went out Trevelyan turned his face to the wall and groaned.

"Never more!" he said to himself, "never more! I have looked my last upon the one face I care to see."

CHAPTER II.

"A life of nothings, nothing worth,
From that first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth!"

—*The Two Voices.*

It was a late spring in England. Cutting east winds had prevailed through the whole of May, and at the end of the month there came a frost so severe as to nip to the core the well-expanded blossoms of the Dorset apple-

orchards, and with them the hopes of a profitable harvest.

"What could God A'mighty mean by sending such a cruel night of weather?" asked one honest farmer of another, as they stood beneath the blackened branches; and gardeners surveyed with equal despair the scorched and shrivelled appearance of their wall-fruit trees, which yesterday had been alive with promise.

The very woods seemed to suspend development; the oak and beech still showed their gaunt, gray boughs but thinly clad with tender leafage; and the ebon buds of the ash were locked hard and close in the ungenial air. Here and there the wild cherry and crab gleamed white or pink against the dim and dusky pines; and the pale stars of the persistent primrose still covered the banks among the mossy roots of hazels through which the ferns were thrusting their russet scrolls. But the tender blue of the forget-me-not and the full amethyst of the hyacinth delayed their blossoming, and the spotted cowslip refused to open in the hard and frost-bound meadows.

Methuen Place, the seat of one of the oldest families in the county, but at the same time of a family whose annals were unknown to fame, stood in a hollow facing the wide upland sweep of its magnificent park, and served as half-way house between the substantial borough of Crawford on the one side, and the county town of Trichester on the other. It was a low, picturesque pile of massive gray stone, bearing the weather-stains and minute moss-growths of generations upon its hoary front, and with the deep angles of its solid walls and the arch of its ponderous entrance-gates covered with the lustrous green of magnolias and myrtles.

But in the late afternoon of the day when Philip Methuen first saw it, its aspect was singularly forlorn and depressing. He had driven in a hack-fly from the station at Trichester, and was chilled to the bone by his long journey through the biting air, as well as by a sense of discomfiture at the seeming absence of all welcome or expectation of his coming.

In reply to his inquiry as to whether there were any servant or carriage waiting for him from Methuen Place, the station-master had answered in the negative, with a certain dry significance which somehow brought the color into his cheek; and the man whose vehicle he had

chosen, addressing the rubicund driver of the "Antelope" railway 'bus, just on the point of departure with its scanty freight, said, with a wink of intense significance, as he took his seat on the box and picked up the reins:

"If the gen'elman knowed Sir Giles' grays as well as you and I do, Bill, he might have saved hisself the trouble of asking the question."

He was quite prepared under encouragement to have given Philip the most minute information respecting his uncle's establishment, habits, and reputation; but that did not suit the young man's mood or temper, although he was not able to defend himself from the damaging impression instinctively received. As they entered the park and approached the house, he perceived that every blind was down, giving a blank and dismal effect to the whole façade. The flower-beds were empty of flowers, the soil lying under heaps of garden compost, and the lawns, under the scorching east winds, looked brown and impoverished. Not a gleam of color or suggestion of warmth, natural or human, met his eyes, nor did there seem any stir of life about the premises—not even the bark of a dog was to be heard. But then it was to be remembered the house contained the dead heir and the dead hopes of its owner.

The driver had made his way up the broad, shallow stone steps which led to the principal entrance, and had knocked heavily at the door, muttering, "It was allers desp'rate hard to rouse 'em."

He was going to repeat the summons, when Philip jumped out to stop him; the sound seemed like sacrilege on that gloomy portal.

"We will wait a minute," he said; "perhaps you don't know there is a death in the house?"

The man grinned. "Don't know that Mark Methuen is dead!" he answered; "all the county knows that well enough, and knows, too, that the old man and his son hated each other like poison. No one would ever have taken *him* for a gentleman, whichever way up you tried it. He was a rum 'un," he added, reflectively, "he was!"

At this moment the door was suddenly thrown open, and Philip stepped for the first time over the threshold of his ancestral home.

From a boy he had listened to the querulous, embittered complaints of his mother at her banishment from all share of the family distinction and privileges, and the

shameful injustice accruing, not so much to younger sons as to younger sons' wives. Her conceptions of the glories of Methuen Place, and of her brother-in-law's social importance, were probably exaggerated; but still this was the house where generation had succeeded generation, and where his own father had first drawn the breath of life.

Words would be inadequate to describe the strength of the yearning with which the boy, mocked and misunderstood by his surviving parent, had regarded his father's memory; and the prospect of so soon seeing one so closely allied to him in blood as Sir Giles Methuen caused him a profound secret agitation.

There was something of this indicated in the tone in which he inquired after his uncle of the staid, elderly woman who had advanced to meet him as he entered the house; and it may have had the effect of causing some softening of expression on her part, combined as it was with that easy graciousness of accost which is all but invariably wanting in the manners of young Englishmen to their inferiors, and a smile the sweetness of which would have redeemed the ugliest face, and was even the crowning charm of his.

"Sir Giles keeps his room strictly since—since what has happened," she said; "but he gave orders, if you arrived before dark, that you were to be shown upstairs to him at once. I will take you to your room, sir, and come back for you as soon as I have given notice. I dare say you would much rather have dressed and dined first; but Sir Giles is not one to think much of these things, Mr. Methuen."

"Neither do I. I shall be quite ready when you come for me."

He followed her up the broad, shallow oak staircase—almost as black as ebony with age and friction, and the massive balustrade of which was carved at its junction and terminal points with elaborate grotesqueness—across a wide corridor, set with numerous windows on the one side, commanding a view of the park, and which were faced by doors on the other.

There was an effect of old-world decaying luxury in the worn carpet which covered the floor, the finely-harmonized colors and fabric of which proclaimed the work of some Eastern loom—in the heavy tapestried draperies at the windows, and the old velvet-padded seats below.

The family coat of arms, with the traditional badge of its rank, were emblazoned in the upper lights of each, and dim portraits of long-deceased ancestors filled up the panels of the wall.

The bed-chamber into which he was shown was on the same scale of ancient, ponderous dignity. Bed, couches, and windows were hung or covered with superb old tapestry, and the black-oak floor displayed the same costly though decaying covering as the corridor outside. There were carved chairs and presses in the apartment which a modern æsthete would have estimated at half a king's ransom; and the high mantel, curiously niched and carved, would incontinently have been removed by him to one of the reception-rooms of the house.

The woman who had introduced herself to Philip as Mrs. Gibson, the housekeeper of the establishment, attended him upstairs with a mixed air of solicitude and formality. On entering the room she indicated to him certain arrangements for his comfort, which seemed to prove her undisputed control over the household, and left him with a broad hint to be quick at his toilet, as "Sir Giles was well-nigh worn out with trouble, and never very patient at the best of times."

The young man's preparations were so rapid that he was standing waiting before the window which overlooked the principal gardens, observing the dreary effect of a pretty Italian fountain, the basin of which was dry and moss-grown, and the conch of the water-god a receptacle for drifting leaves, when the expected summons came, and a few moments more saw him ushered into his uncle's presence. The room was a small study, lined with books from floor to ceiling, but otherwise somewhat barely furnished. A huge easy-chair was placed near one of the windows with its back to the door, and the figure of the man sitting in it was so frail and bowed as to be quite invisible to any one entering the room.

Mrs. Gibson, having opened the door and pronounced the name of the visitor, had instantly retreated, closing it carefully behind her.

Philip hesitated a moment; then he saw a thin white hand, with long, supple fingers, grasp the table which stood close to the chair, and Sir Giles Methuen, raising himself with evident difficulty, faced round and confronted his nephew.

The figure was insignificant, as we have said, and the

delicately-featured face was prematurely worn and old; but the eyes which shone under the thick, gray brows retained their fire and penetration, and there was nothing senile in the hard expression of the firm, thin lips.

There was neither affection nor even benevolence in his scrutiny—it was simply an investigation; and after a few moments he sank back again into his chair with a sort of stifled groan, whether produced by bodily or mental distress seemed doubtful.

The young man, though certainly not encouraged to do so, came forward, and after his foreign fashion took his uncle's hand and put it to his lips.

"I am come," he said, "because you commanded me to come. You cannot be more grieved for the cause than I am."

Sir Giles shivered a little as if cold, and continued to gaze at him intently.

"There is not a line of your figure nor a feature of your face which recalls my brother," he said, "which is to your advantage unquestionably, for the Methuens were never a handsome race. No doubt you are like the woman he married." A sneer sat on his lips as he spoke. "I think I can trust my memory sufficiently to be sure upon the point; but your voice, Philip Methuen, would be enough to convince me of your identity. Say something else."

"Shall I say how sorry I am to find you so weak and ill?"

"Also so old and unprepossessing? Yet hardly that! When was the failure of the man in possession otherwise than welcome to the heir?"

Philip smiled. "That is only from the lips outward; you do not really believe your brother's son is capable of such a feeling. Also you must be aware that I have planned my life on very different lines. I want nothing that you can give me. Even now I am come out of respect due to the head of my family—more to listen to what your wishes are than with the purpose of yielding to them. That will be a question for debate."

Sir Giles' keen glance quickened.

"'Pon my soul, nephew, you lose no time in taking the initiative! I think we will waive the discussion of your future till the natural heir, lying upstairs, is buried. It would have been more seemly if you had begun by offering me your condolences, instead of assuring me of your

obstinacy and independence. Have you lost sight of the fact that I am a father bereaved of his only son?"

Philip looked at him. There was no suggestion of tenderness or pain in the expression of the eyes that met his, or in the sharp ring of the metallic voice. He felt ashamed for the man who seemed to repudiate the first instincts of humanity, and a pang of pity for the dead, who, though cut off in the flower of his youth, left no regrets behind him.

"It is just because I have not lost sight of that," he answered, "that I have no condolence to offer. I am afraid to touch a wound so deep and so recent."

A dark, reluctant flush came over the old man's face.

"What can you know?" he said, in a dull, suppressed voice. "But I am prepared to tell you that your consideration is overstrained. It is true I have lost my only son, but it is not true that I am bereaved. I am shocked, shaken, thrown out of gear with the future, when I thought time and I had settled our accounts. But the feeling at bottom is this—that an anxiety which has corroded my life is removed; that I shall once more hold up my shamed head and look the world in the face; that the burden of degradation and hopeless misery which was imposed by the man who is dead, has unexpectedly slipped off my shoulders. You are scandalized?"

There was an intensity of restrained emotion in Sir Giles' look and speech which overcame the instinctive repulsion with which Philip listened to him.

"At least," he said, "it is an immunity dearly purchased, and while life lasted there was hope of amendment and pardon."

"There was none," interrupted Sir Giles harshly—"none other than that thorns should bring forth grapes, or corruption incorruption. His has been no ordinary career of youthful profligacy—the mere wasting of his substance with harlots—but a thorough identification with the lowest and basest forms of ill-living. There was not one spark of generous fire in his blood; not one sound spot in his soul to redeem the general leprosy. I groaned daily under the fear that he would carry our name into the felon's dock; and I deliberately thank God that his power to inflict torment has been cut short. I slept last night better than I have slept since he was a child, incapable of doing wrong because incapable of free action."

Then, with a quick change of tone and glance, he added:

"It may be, nephew, that your virtue has the same security—a predestined priest is still under authority."

"I have no reason to think myself different from other men. I am quite prepared to grant that my life has been so carefully guarded that no merit attaches to my obedience. More than that, the time can never come for me when I shall cease to think myself under authority."

"So far good; to-morrow I shall put your docility to the test. Now go downstairs and have some dinner; and I hope the necessity of dining alone won't spoil your appetite. I have long ceased to play the host. For the rest, we will not meet again till to-morrow's ceremony—it will be a very brief one. The church is only a stone's-throw from the house, and the vault was opened for its prey days ago. The coffin will be borne by the servants of the house. A few friends will attend for decency's sake. You and I, as nearest of kin, will be chief mourners, Philip."

The young man inclined his head; then said, with some hesitation, "I do not know the English customs, but if it were possible for me to see my cousin, I should like to do so."

"It is not possible—the coffin was nailed down forty-eight hours after death. You know that he died in the hunting-field—by a sort of irony of fate the only field where he ever distinguished himself. A sharp flint cut the sensitive hoof of his horse; the animal plunged suddenly and threw him over his head. When they picked him up he was quite dead—his neck was broken."

"God rest his soul!" was Philip's instinctive response.

Sir Giles looked at him sharply, then his face twitched and softened.

"The furnace will need to be heated seven times hotter before his purgation is attained; but if you hold that prayers of yours or others may help the process, do not balk your charity! They shall take you to the chapel after you have dined. We will say good-night now."

He waved his hand and dismissed him.

CHAPTER III.

"Naught is more honorable to a knight,
Nor better doth beseem brave chivalry,
Than to defend the feeble in their right,
And wrong redress in such as wend awry."

—SPENSER.

As Philip passed out of the corridor, Mrs. Gibson came forward to meet him. It looked as if she had been waiting for him.

"I will show you the way downstairs, sir," she said. "Dinner is laid in the breakfast-room, and you must be sorely in need of something to eat. It is my duty to look after you to-night."

She preceded him as she spoke, and opened the door of an apartment where a large fire was blazing in the wide chimney: the incandescent mass of glowing coal had just been replenished, producing that union of intense heat and exhilarating flame which is an Englishman's ideal of comfort. In its cheery influence a small round table was set, with all the accessories of fine linen, translucent glass, and highly burnished silver, which he also holds to be indispensable for decent existence, but which struck young Methuen's eyes as elaborate and unnecessary. Almost immediately on his appearance the old butler of the house entered and deposited on the table a small silver tureen, from which an exquisite aroma issued, of the singular virtue of which I am bound to confess that Philip was too little of an epicure to form an adequate estimate.

"Sir Giles desired me to ask what wine you preferred, Mr. Methuen," said the man, with an air in which deference and patronage were curiously balanced.

"I have no choice, for I never drink any," was the answer, which was received in solemn, undemonstrative silence, but with secret astonishment and displeasure. A Methuen who did not appreciate the traditional glories of the ancestral cellars was unworthy of his birthright. Also he observed, as he rigidly fulfilled the functions of his office, that the young man was an indifferent and unappreciative eater, upon whom the delicacies of the *cuisine*, which the fastidiousness of Sir Giles had wrought to a point of perfection not often found in remote country-houses, were signally thrown away. He evidently

ate because he was hungry, and he was moderate to the point of provocation.

In fact, it was a positive relief to Philip when the formal and elaborate little dinner was brought to an end. Neither the excitement of his introduction to his uncle nor the distraction of interests in which he had become so suddenly involved sufficed to banish from his mind for many consecutive minutes the eager, pallid face and desperate hopelessness of poor Lewis Trevelyan, and the pledge which he had himself given—a pledge he was already considering how best to fulfil. He was quite resolved that nothing should keep him at Methuen Place beyond the day of the funeral, and had calculated that by travelling day and night he might reach Florence early on the Saturday morning; but in that case he must see the vicar's wife, if possible, this same evening; to-morrow would probably be beyond his control. But a good many hours still stretched between him and any reasonable time for going to bed; and, unconventional as the season was for a visit to a stranger, the nature of his business and the hard pressure of circumstances would surely be sufficient excuse. He rang the bell, and it was answered, as he had hoped, by Mrs. Gibson.

"I am going out," he said, "if you will be good enough to direct me to the vicarage at Skeffington, and will explain to Sir Giles, if he should make any inquiries after me, that I had important business to transact there. Otherwise it will not be necessary to mention my absence."

A cloud of disapprobation darkened her face.

"The vicar is not at home, sir," she answered, "and the house is two good miles from Methuen Place. Sir Giles and Mr. Sylvestre do not visit, and it would vex him very much that you should go there. Excuse the liberty I take, Mr. Methuen, but to our notions it would not seem proper that you should be paying visits before the funeral, and a little odd, too, seeing we all understood that you were a stranger in these parts. Besides——"

She stopped short, then added, with a dull flush of color rising in her sallow cheek, and encouraged by a second glance at Philip, "Besides, we did all hope that you would please the master, and this would be going contrary to him at once."

"I am very sorry, but this business of mine which

takes me to the vicarage is not a matter of choice. I shall be quite prepared to tell Sir Giles all about it if he should care to listen. To-night is the only opportunity I should have; and it is not the vicar, but Mrs. Sylvestre, I want to see. Is she likely to be at home at this hour? Do you know her? I should be glad if you would speak to me frankly."

Mrs. Gibson drew up her tall, spare form with an air of dignity impugned.

"Living in Skeffington for the last forty years, as I have done, it's a need-be that I should know her, though few and far between are the words we have exchanged with each other. She knows every man, woman, and child in the parish, and she's more vicar than the vicar himself. She is a masterful woman, Mr. Methuen, with a hard, cold eye and a heart to match. Not a bad sort altogether, I dare say, but a woman whom love never comes near. She has three nice little girls; and I believe she and the little governess they keep work very hard at their education, but they don't look happy, poor things! Another thing where she has hurt and angered the master is that she is dead against all Catholics; she has even talked to Sir Giles himself, and he is too much of a gentleman to be rude to her. There are plenty of charities connected with this parish, but she takes care no one outside her own church gets the benefit of them. She is terribly hard on Dissenters and *Papists*, as she calls us. If you want really to know what Mrs. Sylvestre is, I could tell you some sad stories——"

"Not now," said Philip, "or I shall have no courage left to go and see her, and nothing else remains to be done. Please send me some stable-boy or helper as guide to the house, as I cannot spare the time to lose my way."

It was nearly eight o'clock when Philip found himself on the road to Skeffington. Had the season been a normal one, and the daylight served, he would have enjoyed as fair a sample of Dorset landscape, as he walked between the hedgerows which bounded his path, as he could possibly have desired. Beyond, on the right hand and on the left, stretched corn or pasture lands, almost to the verge of the horizon, save where the monotony was broken by a clump of farm-buildings, or some apple-orchard, shimmering, phantom-like, in the semi-darkness; or again, by a gleam of the not-far-distant sea,

and of a broken line of lofty hills, the crests of two of which served as landmarks to home-coming vessels.

The straggling village when reached surprised Philip, both in regard to its extent and its unsightliness; and even a hasty glance served to discover unmistakable indications of squalid poverty and degradation, which seemed to him strangely incongruous in such close connection with the parsonages and country-seats of rural England.

The boy who had come with him as guide pointed out a picturesque, ivy-covered house, enclosed by a high wall overgrown with greenery.

"This's the vicarage," he said, touched his hat, and retired.

Hastily turning round, Philip had time to perceive that the boy did not return on his steps as he had heard Mrs. Gibson charge him to do, but disappeared within the portal of a cheery-looking tavern, the swinging sign-board of which announced it to be the "Methuen Arms."

Doubtless other causes than a landlord's negligence and a priest's apathy went to swell the sum total of Skeffington's immorality.

The entrance-door to the vicarage was low and wide, and roofed by a heavily-timbered, old-fashioned portico; within its shelter stood, in ugly green-wire stands, some evergreen shrubs and flowering plants. A curious heavy bell-rope hung outside the lintel, and seemed to solicit an appeal. Philip rang it more than once, in spite of a fair exercise of patience, before the door was opened, and even then the maid-servant barred his entrance rather than invited it.

To his inquiries whether Mrs. Sylvestre were at home, she answered with evident reluctance in the affirmative, but begged to know what his business might be, before allowing him to advance farther than the hall. Philip took out a card and wrote a few explanatory words upon it, doubting very much whether they would be legible, as there was no light beyond that supplied by the now moon-illuminated twilight; the lamp which hung from the lobby ceiling not being utilized.

He stood for some time, with increasing anxiety as to the lateness of the hour and the seeming impropriety of his absence at such a time from his uncle's house, when suddenly a rush of voices reached his ears. Down the dim staircase came the sound of a child's voice, weeping

bitterly, and protesting feebly through its sobs; the high, clear notes of an angry woman's shrill but restrained treble, and the low, rich baritone of a young man's voice.

"I assure you, Mrs. Sylvestre, the fault is mine, entirely mine! and yet I had not the least idea we were eating forbidden fruit, Dolly and I. Please don't scold her any more—I repeat I led her into mischief."

Then came a tender wail: "Indeed, indeed, mamma——" interrupted by a voice of judicial severity:

"*Scold* is a word scarcely to be applied to a mother's distressed and reasonable displeasure. I never scold, Mr. Earle! Go to your room, Dorothy, and we will renew the subject to-morrow, when you will have slept upon your disobedience, and be better prepared to admit the justice of your punishment."

Then came another burst of distress, which, in its intensity, almost brought Philip to the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, please, mamma, forgive me to-night—do forgive me to-night! I shan't sleep a wink!"

At this crisis the servant had evidently ventured to approach with his own card, for Mrs. Sylvestre turned sharply round upon her.

"What is it, Janet? Don't you know better than——"

And then a sudden silence fell. Philip heard the child's retreating footsteps back to her room, a whispered word from the masculine voice, and the next moment a young man had precipitated himself down the few shallow stairs, and would have come into collision with him had he not avoided the sudden charge by a swift movement of retreat.

"Who the devil are you?" cried the voice, with an accent of intense irritation, due rather to the recent incident than the present surprise.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" he hastened to add, having now set light to the hall-lamp from a box of matches he produced from his pocket, and discovered his mistake. "I thought no one could stand on that hall-mat but one of the Skeffington paupers—a gentleman is so rare a visitor here that Janet, as you see, has no experience to fall back upon. Do let me repair her mistake, and take you into a sitting-room. Perhaps you don't know the vicar is away from home at present?"

It was not often that Adrian Earle roused himself to so much active intervention on behalf of a stranger, or

that his languid tones assumed so much charitable vivacity; but the meagre glimmer of the hall-lamp fell direct upon Philip Methuen's person, and he received at that moment the impression which abode with him more or less through all the years of their subsequent intercourse. It was not so much the attraction of beauty of feature or perfection of physical development that touched him, though few were more susceptible to external influences of the kind, but something in the expression and general aspect that won his immediate recognition and regard. At least, he had never seen one of his own age and sex who moved him so strongly.

Love at first sight is an accepted possibility, but may not friendship also be as swift and tender in its inception? When the "soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David," speech had not even passed between them. There is no deeper and no diviner mystery in being than the sense of spiritual kinship which suddenly stirs and quickens in two human souls, brought perhaps for the first time together, and ignorant of the past record of each.

"I am Adrian Earle," he said, and held out his hand. "Will you tell me your name?" But before the other could answer, Mrs. Sylvestre came forward and broke the colloquy.

"I have the pleasure of bidding you good-night, Mr. Earle," she said; and then, addressing the stranger in a tone of freezing distance, as if afraid of some burst of familiarity on his part, "If you are really Mr. Philip Methuen, will you be good enough to follow me?"

A few moments more and they were seated opposite each other in a fireless room; but Philip was conscious of a momentary slackening of interest in his embassy, and that his attention was fixed upon the closing house-door and retreating steps upon the gravel.

When he had recovered himself, he found that Mrs. Sylvestre sat awaiting his communication with a demeanor so deliberately expressionless as to tax the courage of any advocate.

He half doubted, as he looked at her, if any fate might not be happier for Anna Trevelyan than an asylum with her aunt. Contact, he perceived, would mean conflict.

"I understand from your card," said Mrs. Sylvestre, referring to it, and breaking the awkward silence from some instinct of courtesy, "that I have the honor of a

visit from Mr. Philip Methuen, and that he excuses the unusual hour he has chosen on the plea of business of pressing importance. I own I am at a loss to understand how any matter that concerns him can concern me. If you are the bearer of compliments or concessions from Sir Giles Methuen, my husband is not at home to reply to them."

"No," said Philip, quietly; "my message is to you only, and it is from your brother, Lewis Trevelyan."

He had calculated upon her insensibility to emotion, and was startled by the sudden change of color and aspect.

"Forgive my abruptness, but my time is so short that it must plead my excuse. I have the honor to call Mr. Trevelyan my friend, and I left him last Monday in a condition so near death that it is a question whether I shall find him alive on my return, even if I succeed in getting back to Florence by Saturday. One duty which has brought me to Skeffington is, as you probably know, to attend my cousin's funeral; but I should have come without that call."

He paused and looked at her, as if his own sincere and kindly sympathy would evoke hers.

"You are waiting for me to ask you why you would have come, and I do ask you. What is the connection between your friendship for Lewis Trevelyan and your visit to me? Has he made no provision for his funeral expenses? Does he clinch the dishonor of a life by this last appeal to a sister's charity?"

Her cheeks burned with a crimson spot of color, and her large, prominent blue eyes scintillated with passion; but it was passion held well under control. Philip met her gaze with one of equal steadiness, until she flinched a little under the stern displeasure of his face.

"Words like yours," he said, "are such as we regret on our death-bed; and they should close this interview, Mrs. Sylvestre, if it were a time to consult personal feeling. But I do not lose sight of the fact that you have suffered deeply through your brother, and that the better feelings of the heart are often belied by hasty words. If you could see him as I saw him last, I think you would blot out his transgressions against you, and consent to relieve his mind of the cruel anxiety he feels on behalf of his daughter Anna. I am come here to ask you if you will take her home when her father is dead."

A curious expression, which baffled him, came over her face.

"I like your courage and your directness," she said. "One more inmate in a poor parson's family to feed, clothe, and educate is of course a matter of small consideration to an inexperienced young man like yourself. Am I to believe that Lewis Trevelyan sanctioned this appeal? that, after having robbed me of fortune and happiness, he has the effrontery to ask me to make a daily sacrifice for the benefit of his orphan? I decline absolutely."

"He was reluctant; but I overruled his reluctance. I thought the very wrongs of which you complain might have disposed you the more readily to do your duty, as having the greater virtue in the sight of God. I had the notion that good women welcomed sacrifice, especially those who have endured the discipline of motherhood; at least, I thought you could not turn your back on your brother's child. I still think so."

"Every word you utter," she answered, with concentrated bitterness, "is an offence. Put your orphan into some of your charitable asylums abroad! You may gauge the depth of my repugnance when I tell you I should feel no compunction at knowing she was to be brought up in a creed which to my mind means perdition. What you say shows me you also are 'a holy Roman;' but your argument has no weight with me. Has my brother joined your communion? It makes gracious provision for reprobates and sinners such as he."

"You have pronounced its highest encomium, madam," said Philip, with a smile; "but I regret to say he has not, nor has his daughter Anna been educated as a Catholic. To be honest, her education, both religious and secular, has been greatly neglected, and her character is such that the charge of her would not be a light one. Mr. Trevelyan is not without friends or resources, and arrangements would be made to guarantee the guardians of his child £200 a year."

"That is a fact you should have mentioned first. If I report this conversation to my husband, he will advise me—to turn my maternal discipline to account and sacrifice myself!"

The sneer was so heartless that it very much qualified Philip's satisfaction in the success of his mission. At

the same time he recognized the possibility that Mrs. Sylvestre was not so bad as she chose to appear; that there would be the decent restraints of social opinion and the probable kindness of other members of the family working in Anna's behalf. He recalled with satisfaction Dorothy's pleading voice, and the terms of familiar intercourse on which Adrian Earle appeared to be with the household. Anyway, nothing more was in his power.

"I understood you to say that the payment you mentioned would be *guaranteed* to the guardians of the child? I am not in the least ashamed to own that what I refused to do as a matter of duty or charity, I am prepared to do on the score of advantage to my family."

Philip's brows contracted a little.

"The money shall be paid half-yearly through an old-established bank in Paris. If you have any further suggestions to make, they shall receive due consideration." He rose to take leave. "I dare not stay any longer," he added. "Am I to understand you will receive Anna?" He looked round the colorless room and into the face of its mistress. "Bear with one word more, Mrs. Sylvestre. You do not love this girl—and, I will allow, you have no reason to do so—but you accept the charge of her for a fair pecuniary equivalent. You will be just to Anna Trevelyan—you who resent so strongly the injustice you have endured from her father?"

Mrs. Sylvestre smiled.

"I will be just to Anna Trevelyan, according to my lights, Mr. Methuen; but my point of view is not the same as yours. How old is she? Describe her!"

"She is fifteen, well grown and healthy, intelligent but very ignorant, having lived a wild life in the home of an Italian peasant, her foster-mother, when her father's health prevented him from having her with him."

"She can read and write, I presume, and speak her father's language? Is she a beauty?"

"The time is not yet come to decide the point, and I am no judge. She can certainly read and write."

There was a pause, during which Philip was conscious of a searching examination.

"You are at St. Sulpice, educating for the priesthood, and have obtained leave of absence for your cousin's funeral?"

"That is so," he answered, "and there is nothing more to say about me. I have the honor to wish you good-night."

She returned his bow without extending her hand, and he found his way to the house-door unattended.

CHAPTER IV.

"Shall we with temper spoiled,
Health sapped by living ill,
And judgment all embroiled
By sadness and self-will,
Shall we judge what for man is not true bliss or is?"
—M. ARNOLD.

MRS. GIBSON met him as he re-entered his uncle's house.

"Sir Giles has asked for you, Mr. Methuen, and I was obliged to say you were gone out, sir, and where. He was terribly put out. I am afraid he will get no sleep to-night. It is a bad beginning!"

"Shall I go to him? I can put all right with a word."

"No; he gave orders he was to be told when you came in, but that he did not wish to see you. He asked if you had been to the chapel."

"I am ready to go there at once, if you will show me the way. I suppose," he added, with some hesitation, "that the watch has been duly kept?"

"The servants have relieved each other," she answered, "and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Trichester have attended as they could; but they are few, and their duties are heavy. Father Francis came a few hours ago, and has undertaken to stay till morning."

They crossed the full length of the house, and descended a short flight of stone steps, which led to the small, isolated structure which had been fitted up and consecrated as a chapel more than two hundred years ago. It was now seldom used except as a mortuary. Giles Methuen had never been devout, and a priest had long ceased to form part of his domestic establishment. They entered the chapel together; it was heavily draped with velvet hangings, which had grown old in the service of the family. All light was excluded but that which was supplied by the huge wax-tapers burning on the bare, neglected altar, and at the head and foot of the

coffin, which was covered by a voluminous velvet pall, with tarnished fringe of bullion, and the arms of the house emblazoned in gold.

A man knelt at the foot of the coffin, supporting the weight of his body against it. He did not stir as they entered; Philip perceived at a glance that he was profoundly asleep.

He had dismissed Mrs. Gibson on the threshold, and as soon as the door had closed upon her, he went up and surveyed the figure. His feeling was that of indignant reprobation as toward a sentinel found sleeping at the post of duty; but his anger softened as he saw the gray hairs, frail figure, and worn face of the defaulter.

"Doubtless the spirit was willing, but the flesh is weak," he said to himself, "and I am here to supply his lack of service."

He looked down at the length and breadth of the coffin, which testified to the fine physical development of the dead, and recalled the terrible words spoken by the unloving father that day.

Death in the bloom and prime of life always seems an anachronism or a penalty, especially when the blow has fallen without warning. But to have met such a fate unlamented—to be consigned without reluctance to the grave—was a moral ignominy against which the young man's sensitive soul cried out.

He drew his breviary out of his pocket, and knelt down to commence his night's vigil with a religious fervor which amounted almost to passion.

Even death was no barrier between the guilty soul and the mercy of its Judge, so long as the prayers of saints and priests intervened: only he, alas! was but half-way to the divine privileges of the priesthood.

The next day the blinds were drawn up, and the windows thrown open at Methuen Place, admitting the keen spring air and reluctant sunshine. In the household arrangements there seemed a certain eagerness to wipe out all traces of the dead man who had just been laid to rest among his ancestors. The bed-chamber he had occupied when alive was already in the hands of the housemaids, Mrs. Gibson herself superintending their work, and placing carefully under lock and key, or otherwise hiding from sight, all the personal belongings of Mark Methuen.

These were of a kind which justified such haste. First came scores of female photographs, many of which bore the autograph of presentation upon them, ranging from the modified offence of vapidty or effrontery through the complete circle of provocative indecency.

Betting manuals and French novels of the lowest kind were the only literature which lay ready to hand on the shelves and available surfaces of the room; while there was something curious in the accumulation of cigar-cases, pocket-books, and receptacles for cards, letters, fuses, and so forth—most of which were more costly and ornate than a man is accustomed to buy for himself. Possibly there was a link of connection between them and the originals of some of the photographs: they may have represented the return for wasted health, wealth, and character.

Sir Giles Methuen had borne his part during the funeral service with great dignity and composure. If the tender grief of the bereaved father were lacking, there was a far more poignant anguish in the consciousness that such grief was impossible. Every phrase of religious submission or aspiration—the devout formulas which imply mental distress and suggest consolation, the condolences offered by friends (thoroughly acquainted with the facts of the case) with the conventional air of pity and sympathy—were each and all a separate stab to the sensitive heart of the proud old man. He excused himself from the luncheon which was served on their return from the chapel, but not before he had presented Philip to them as his nephew and heir, and begged that they would look upon him as his representative at the table.

As soon as he had left the room, the mental atmosphere brightened—the air of decorous depression and gravity disappeared, and a general sense of relief restored each man to his natural character. Condolences were exchanged for congratulations, and bumpers filled and emptied to Philip Methuen's good fortune.

"The king is dead! Long live the king!" cried Sir Walter Earle, a baronet whose ancestors had fought beside Harold at Hastings, and whose honor had been kept up until the present generation by a race of warriors. "But how is it we are welcoming him for the first time to-day?"

The tone and glance conveyed a compliment. He

was a much-travelled man of the world, to whom life and society had been both a career and a success, and his practiced eye saw in Philip welcome marks of distinction and individuality.

"Come," he added, "you must pledge us in return. We have left all our regrets in the Methuen vault, and are prepared to be on the best of terms with the new heir."

Philip hesitated; then said, as he touched his glass with his lips:

"I hope you won't discredit my gratitude because I acknowledge your kindness in water. I never expected to find myself in this position, and have had no training for it. But—did my uncle never speak of me to any of his friends? Do you know nothing about me?"

"Beyond the fact that a nephew existed, we knew very little," replied Sir Walter, smiling. "The truth is, that I was your father's friend in the old times, and ventured to resent the treatment he received from his brother at his marriage; naturally, he has not made me his confidant."

"My father's friend!" repeated Philip, his whole face alight with sensibility. "If at some future time you will talk to me about him, I shall be more grateful than words can express."

"The sooner the better, my dear fellow. You speak with his voice, which is another claim upon my goodwill. But where have you been in hiding all these years? Yours are not the manners of Oxford or Cambridge, and yet it is evident your mother has done her duty in your education."

"I was six years in England, after my father's death, under the charge of one of his old college friends. Since that time I have been at the Seminary of St. Nicholas in Paris, then some years at Issy, and the last five at St. Sulpice."

"At St. Sulpice! I thought that was only an institution for priests?"

"And my destination is the priesthood."

There was a general movement of amused astonishment.

One man remarked, caressing his well-trained moustache, and gazing at Philip as if he had been some *lusus naturæ*:

"It seems almost as odd in these days for a man to

talk seriously of going in for the priesthood as it would for her Majesty to announce her intention of touching for the king's evil!"

"It seems?" repeated Philip, quietly—"that is, from your point of view. To me and many others it would be hard to find a point of resemblance between an act of ludicrous assumption and the solemn choice of a profession."

"But," interposed Sir Walter, bent upon forestalling a rejoinder, "at least we are all well pleased that, since poor Mark has died, he died in time to prevent your putting the seal on your vocation. They may look elsewhere for recruits. Nature never intended that head of yours for the tonsure. We will show you the other side of the shield!"

Philip, anxious to divert attention from himself, allowed the remark to pass unchallenged, and, after a little more general conversation, the guests rose to take leave.

Sir Walter Earle shook him cordially by the hand.

"Come and see me as soon as you can. We are a mixed household at Earlescourt, but not without points of interest. My eldest son is about your own age, and at once my pride and my despair; my youngest—but it is hardly worth while to disclose my skeletons myself. One word more. I have been speculating how you and your uncle will get on together. It will be a new thing for Sir Giles to have a young man of your sort to deal with; take care that you don't both make serious mistakes."

The question of how they would get on together was very soon to be decided, as Philip received a summons from his uncle as soon as the latter had learnt that he was alone.

Sir Giles Methuen was sitting in the same place as on the preceding day, and looked, if possible, still more frail and broken down. He signified to Philip to take a chair opposite to him, and sat examining him in silence for several minutes. Then he said:

"I suppose it is your foreign education which has deprived you of the national grace of *mauvais honte*. Few young men in your position would stand investigation as you do. You do not even change color or look uncomfortable. Ah, I am glad to see you have the grace to blush a little!"

"If I do not look uncomfortable, I have more self-command than I thought, for I feel profoundly uncomfortable. I have so much to say that I know it will displease you to hear."

Sir Giles frowned impatiently.

"I never knew any one more anxious to force a quarrel than yourself. However, I insist upon the right my age and position give me to have the first word. Before you tell me your intentions, Philip Methuen, I will lay before you my wishes."

He stopped a little as if to arrange his thoughts, then went on:

"I am, as you see, a disappointed, broken-down old man. I look seventy, but am, in fact, ten years younger, and inclined, even at this date, to retrieve my life. I have always considered myself more keen-sighted and acute than other men, and no man has blundered more. I have a warm heart, though no doubt you think otherwise; and I have suffered in all the relations of life. My wife died when a girl; of my son I need speak no more. My brother, whom I loved tenderly, turned against me, sacrificing me and all natural interests for the sake of a selfish, frivolous woman, who only married him under a mistaken notion of the contingent advantages. He paid his penalty, of course; but I do not forget that she who spoiled his life is your mother, and that it will ill become me to abuse her to her son. As her son, you probably know more of her capacity to make a man miserable than I do, or even than your father did, who laid down the burden after some seven years' experience of it."

"I am at least under the deepest obligations to my mother, who has carried out my father's wishes and my own in the most honorable manner."

"Ah," said Sir Giles, "is that so? Your father, as you probably know, inherited from our mother an income of £500 a year—£300 of which he left to his wife for her free use and maintenance, and the remaining £200 to his son, to be spent on his education until he attained his twenty-third year, and to be at his own disposal afterward. I conclude he destined you for the priesthood, that you might escape the rock on which he foundered. It was odd his scheme was willingly accepted by you; things don't often turn out like that. I presume you are acquainted with these particulars, and that you refer to

them when you speak of your mother's honorable fulfilment of her engagements?"

"Just so. I have known the terms of my father's will for many years, and they have, I repeat, been faithfully carried out. No boy could have received a more careful or unbroken education. The expenses of it must have often exceeded the stipulated sum, and hampered my mother, indeed she has sometimes complained on this point."

"She has? I am not surprised," returned Sir Giles, with his keen glance following with amused interest every change of expression in his nephew's face. "You see she chose to live in Florence while you were in England or in Paris, and travelling expenses count. Also, as you grew up, your demands became a little exorbitant. You must not only at Issy engage a professor of Hebrew for your own special edification, but you must learn music, fencing, etching (I believe that was the precise hobby) of professors who came out from Paris to teach you. I own it is a little difficult to harmonize this devotion to worldly pursuits with professed renouncement of the world, and with the declared intention of carrying the acquired gifts and graces as proofs of your vocation as a missionary into the Corea. But what is the matter, nephew? Have you any fault to find with the accuracy of my statement?"

Philip had turned very pale; his practised self-control was being put to a hard test.

"I entreat you," he said, "if you have things to tell me that I do not know, to tell me them plainly, and not in this vein of banter and mockery."

There was such a look of pain in the expression of his face that it touched Sir Giles more than he chose to admit. It was evident that the young man had believed in his mother.

"I am anxious not to be misunderstood," he returned, in the same tone as before, unwilling, from long habit, to give his natural sensibility way. "No doubt you gauged your own requirements correctly; and at least the result is satisfactory. The money has not been thrown away. You are a very accomplished and presentable young fellow, and excellently well drilled, not for the vocation you have chosen, but for that of diplomacy, to which I have good means of introducing you. You shall win the triumphs I have missed."

"We will, if you please, leave all that for the present. I must press for an explanation of what you have just now said."

He got up as he spoke in his agitation, and then sat down again, vexed that he betrayed himself so much. But the blow he had just received struck deep.

Sir Giles watched him a few moments in silence.

"In one word, Philip, I mean this. *I* have defrayed all the charges of your education up to the present hour, and if they have not run on the lines I have just now traced, well, I refer you for the explanation to Mrs. Methuen. Ladies are accomplished casuists, and she no doubt felt justified in mulcting her husband's elder brother to cover her own personal extravagances. I believe her *salon* is quite a fashionable rallying-point in Florence."

Philip turned away from his uncle's relentless scrutiny. There was a look almost of desperation in his face.

"What shall I do?" he asked. "How can I find the means of restitution? It is in my heart to say I will never forgive her."

"Don't say it, nephew. Surely more patience and humility should be the outcome of your spiritual discipline. You will shake my confidence in the Abbé de Sève! As for restitution, I am going to lay claim to that. Fill the place that has been always empty—be a son to my old age, and I will reckon your mother's frauds washed out. Refuse if you are so minded; but you will discover that it will cost both of us dear."

It was evident that the young man was unable to answer immediately. After a long pause, which Sir Giles made no attempt to interrupt, he said:

"With your leave I will go away for a while; I find I am unable to recover myself; I may say what I shall be sorry for."

"Very likely, but that will only be a bond of union between us. My dear boy, I will not let you go away—I had no idea this would have hit you so hard. I thought you knew your mother—more or less."

Knew his mother! He recalled the claim she had always made upon his gratitude on the ground of the education she had sacrificed so much to secure, and how he had met those claims. She had always resisted his modest appeals for an addition to the meagre sum she allowed him for pocket-money which the ardor of his

charity rather than any wish for self-indulgence made so cruelly inadequate, and had also curtailed his necessary expenses within so strict a limit as to leave no margin for self-denial, even to his enthusiasm. Circumstances recurred to his memory when he had besought her help with passionate insistence in some of the crises of his life, and had invariably been repulsed and reproached on plea of the poverty he taxed so heavily.

Not that he much regretted these past deprivations—all that went for little: what did count was, that he had a mother whom he could not honor. Sir Giles had spoken of her *frauds*—it was an inclusive term for shameful acts of selfish dishonesty and imposture; but to have his filial reverence thus torn up by the roots seemed, in the first moments of bitterness, to make all life barren and unprofitable.

“Let us wind up this subject, once and for all,” resumed Sir Giles. “Your mother has not deceived me, for I took means against her doing so. Wherever you have been, Nephew Philip, I have had a correspondent at headquarters who kept me closely informed of your goings-on. I know what money you have had to spend, and how you spent it. I know perfectly that a Hebrew professor has been on the staff at Issy and St. Sulpice ever since the days of good M. Olier. I know, outside of your professional training, that you took lessons of a poor, broken-down violinist, and how you earned the money to pay for them. I know that my good friend, Monseigneur d’Enghien himself, provided a fencing master or a master for those of the pupils destined for missionary enterprise, on the sensible theory that the soldiers of the Church militant should not be worse disciplined than their secular brothers-in-arms. I know—but I will spare your feelings. I must add, however, that the studies in etching were too heavy a draught upon my credulity.”

He stopped, and looked again with mixed anxiety and amusement into the other’s face.

“I see you have the implacable temper of your race—you will not forgive the woman who betrays you. But console yourself with the knowledge that your mother never drew out of my purse more than I had made up my mind to part with. When your father died, I set apart a yearly sum for your benefit; and I may as well add—for further disguise is unnecessary—that without

strict supervision my intentions would have been frustrated. Your mother resented the outlay on your education, though she had not to find the funds, and would have saved out of it if she had been allowed the chance. For the rest, I suffered her to stint and pinch you, regarding it as a salutary discipline for an elect priest and missionary. Now all that is changed."

"Are these facts known to any one else?"

"To a certain extent to our family solicitor, who made your father's will, and knows its provisions have not been fulfilled."

"And can I not make good my legal claim to £200 a year under the provisions of that will?"

"Undoubtedly you can, as well as to the £3,000, more or less, which Mrs. Methuen has appropriated to her own purposes; but you will have neither need nor inclination to do either. Let madam keep the poor income which, even at its best, is too small for her requirements. I will take care to give you an allowance at least equal to what you forego."

"It will not be the same thing. I have a right to the one; the other will be an act of grace, and I shall not feel free to spend the money as I like."

"You will be absolutely free to do so," returned Sir Giles, with a slightly irritated manner; "but may I ask if, on making your escape from the immaculate restraints of St. Sulpice, you have already found a channel for the immediate disbursement of £200 a year?"

Philip looked up, quick to detect the change of tone.

"Pray forgive my bad manners," he said eagerly. "I have forgotten in my distress to acknowledge the extreme kindness and forbearance you have shown both to my mother and me. But, as to the money—I confess I should greatly prefer to have my own. Three hundred pounds a year ought to be enough for my mother's needs."

"Needs, yes; but wants is another thing."

"It will be well for her to restrict her wants to her necessities."

Sir Giles's eyes flashed with amusement.

"You are like all the rest of the saints, nephew, bent upon inflicting penal chastisement upon the sinners; but you ask for more than the poor lady can perform. At the same time, I gather that the £200 a year you bargain for is only to be an instalment of your own expenditure?"

"You have every right to twit me, and I have put myself in a position I ought not. I will tell you all I can. I want this money to meet a claim to which I have pledged my credit, without sufficient consideration, I confess, but I relied on its being absolutely at my own disposal; and, any way, it is pledged beyond recall. I had calculated that my technical education being complete, I could pay for my residence at St. Sulpice by my services; or, to be more candid, I am afraid, under extreme pressure of circumstances, I had not properly considered the consequences of being penniless. That state of things is not quite unknown in the college, and can be endured. Moreover, if I am sent to the Corea, there will be no more question of personal expense: there is a fund to meet all such charges."

"And it does not hurt your pride to stand in *formâ pauperis* like this?"

"If it did, I should take it all as part of the day's work. You will understand, Sir Giles, that my heart is set upon the work in question—that I have ordered my life and schooled my mind for this object. I am fit for no other, and no other has worth or purpose enough in it to give it value in my eyes. I have neither capacity nor inclination for politics, and should fail for certain, causing you more vexation and disappointment than going back to my old calling will do. A week ago you never proposed to know me."

"A week ago I had a son. I put my veto on the priesthood with whatever authority may lie with the head of the house and out of regard to the interests of the race. If you prove stubborn, the name of Methuen dies with you."

"And if I should not prove stubborn, what guarantee is there that I may not be as unfortunate in my son as yourself? Why should you try and coerce me to a course of conduct which you have found fruitful of nothing but bitterness and dissatisfaction? As a priest or missionary, I am able to reconcile life and effort with duty; but I should find it hard to do that as a man of leisure and society, playing at the meagre game of diplomacy in its lower rounds, or as a reluctant husband constitutionally averse to the narrow selfishness of domestic life, and doing my part ill in it."

"My dear fellow," answered Sir Giles, tapping him affectionately on the arm, "you shall go back to St.

Sulpice, and lay this question before our good Archbishop for his decision. To argue with a fanatic is wasted breath, otherwise I would remind you that the vapors of the cloister so hang about you that you cannot see clearly in the open air. You think yourself ice because you have never been near the fire. Simply, you do not know yourself. You have been taught to believe that duty and sacrifice have only one groove to run in. I tell you, if you want the widest field for their exercise, step outside your mystic circle into the world at large; and since you seem to have been born with a singular taste for martyrdom, there are large possibilities that you may win your palm and crown in those domestic relations of which you speak so contemptuously. Further still, I can find you savages in Skeffington who will almost compete in degradation with the yellow barbarians of the Corea, and who will receive your efforts in their behalf with even superior brutality."

Philip smiled. "I should be poaching upon Mr. Sylvestre's manor, and should be warned off at once. I gratefully accept, however, your permission to refer my decision to the Archbishop."

"And you pledge yourself to abide by it?" interrupted Sir Giles, sharply.

"Yes: for it will then become a simple question of obedience; but it grieves me to think of your disappointment. He will not release me."

"In that case I will set you a lesson in philosophy, and console myself, should you be this side of the Pacific, by receiving my *viaticum* at no other hands."

He made a gesture of weariness, as though the interview had been too long for him, and Philip rose at once to go. After a little hesitation, he said:

"Before I leave you, I want your permission to go back to town to-night. I must, if possible, be in Florence by Saturday morning."

"Explain the necessity. Scarcely to bully your mother?"

Philip had the gift of lucidity. In five minutes he had put the facts without comment before Sir Giles—that he had undertaken to be the ambassador of his dying friend to Mrs. Sylvestre, and was deeply anxious to take back to him the good news of his success.

"And that woman has consented to give her niece a home! Has she any fortune?"

"Barely enough to provide the equivalent which it is only fair for Mrs. Sylvestre to require."

Sir Giles pondered. "It is a curious coincidence, but I suppose you are not deceiving me. Go, if you will, and make haste to return. You will, of course, take Paris on your homeward way, and will bring back to me Monseigneur's dictum, whether good or bad." He held out his hand to dismiss him. "It will not be necessary to see me again. I am over-tired. I shall send you a check for your travelling expenses, on the understanding that I will have neither thanks nor repudiation."

CHAPTER V.

"We leave behind,
As chartered by some unknown powers
We stem across the sea of life by night—
The joys that were not for our use designed;
The friends to whom we had no natural right;
The homes that were not destined to be ours."

—M. ARNOLD.

THE interiors of the old houses on the Lung' Arno are picturesque enough when flooded with sunshine and warmth, and every window open to the magical scene outside. But at night, when darkness has wiped out the external world, and shut the inmates within the four walls of the dim, resonant, chilly apartments, without glow of fire or flame of familiar gas, no scene can well be more depressing.

In Florence, too, as in England, the weather had assumed suddenly a wintry chill, and ice-laden winds from the Apennines had swept down the valley of the Arno, which a week or two before had blossomed and expanded under the breath of summer.

Wrapt in an old cloak, and shivering under the insufficient blankets which covered him, Lewis Trevelyan was lying on the comfortless couch on which he now passed both nights and days. By his side was a little table, on which stood a plate of strawberries and a basin of polenta; but the chilled food had thickened round the spoon, and the fruit had lost color and freshness. The large grate, where a fire would have been so welcome,

was filled with cypress boughs; and down the wide chimney the wind had so unobstructed a course as absolutely to make the sprays rustle.

A small oil-lamp was almost lost in the gloom of the big chamber, and barely sufficed to show the three occupants it held. One was the sick man, as we have said; another his daughter Anna, who was kneeling on a footstool at his side, with her long thin arms clasped about him, and her head pillowed on his breast, but in such a position as to enable her to see his face. Beneath his coverings he held one of the girl's hands in a close grasp pressed against his side.

Her posture, the weight of her body, lithe and slim as she was, and the stringency of her embrace, were absolutely painful to his physical sensations; but he had no wish for relief—rather he would have liked to make the union so close between them that the chill of death creeping over his own heart should be able to find the strong pulses of hers, that so they might have gone down to the grave together. Her warm fragrant breath, the intensity of her gaze, the passion of her embrace, the sharp curves of her girlish figure, had each a distinct stab of anguish for the man who was gazing blankly into her uncertain future.

Anna had only been fetched from the country late that afternoon by the Sister of Mercy who was still in attendance upon them, and who, having found her earnest offers of priestly assistance repulsed and her own timid ministrations rejected, had withdrawn far enough away not to disturb the privacy of father and child, and watched the scene in helpless sympathy. They had been talking together, and he had told her of the possibility of having a home in England, and even had tried to make the prospect attractive in spite of his own misgivings, but he was now too exhausted for speech, and silence had lasted for some time.

The old Italian doctor had left instructions for his lips to be continually moistened with wine or milk; and the only sound which broke the stillness of the scene was the occasional movement of the good Sister, intent on the fulfilment of this duty.

Trevelyan submitted to it patiently; his anxiety to keep life in his veins and his brain clear until the day dawned, and with it the faint chance of Philip Methuen's arrival, was so intense as almost to bar the entrance of

"the fell sergeant Death." It was upon this single point that his soul seemed to hang—on the very threshold of the dim hereafter (he would have objected to the phrase of "the unseen world") he did not seem to have either power or will to cast a fear or a hope in advance. He had speculated about religion, and surrendered his cradle-faith after a good deal of mental suffering and conflict; but now, with the end in view, and the solution of lingering doubt so close as to be measured by minutes rather than hours, his spiritual paralysis was complete.

Would Methuen come in time to relieve the tension of his anxiety? was the one thought under which every other yearning was buried. Life was over: it had been a lost game, not worth the passionate playing; but, miserable as he was, he left a child behind him endowed with the same faculties of pain and pleasure, and hopelessly entered for the race doomed before starting for defeat. Cheerless as he considered life's outlook to be, it would be some mitigation of his misery to see once more Philip Methuen's friendly face, hear the result of his mission, and any way pass on the future of the friendless girl into his hands.

As the night wore on, and the struggle for breath became more desperate, Anna had yielded to the necessity of changing her position in order that the dying man might be raised higher on his pillows. He lay with his eyes fixed in the direction of the windows, watching for the first streak of dawn to reveal their glimmering squares, and straining his dulled senses to catch any sound of arrival.

Soon after daylight a cruel stroke of disappointment fell upon him. He heard footsteps upon the threshold of the house, and old Assunta's voice in garrulous greeting and surprise. A gleam of joy lighted up his sunken eyes, and an instinctive "Thank God!" sprang to his lips. The next moment the old doctor, Richetti, had tapped at the chamber door and entered.

"Eh! whom have we here?" he asked, glancing down at Anna, who was crouching beside the sofa, holding her father's hand in both hers, and looking ghost-like in the dim dawn, with her pallid face, distended eyes, and masses of chestnut hair floating over her shoulders. It was only his form of greeting, for he knew the girl well enough. "I am come early, good sister," he went on,

addressing the silent nurse, "for I knew I should be wanted."

He went closer to the couch, and shook his head ominously as he met the look of wan despair in Trevelyan's glazing eyes.

"What does he want?" he asked, testily. "Fetch a priest, good sister; nay, send Assunta, and take away the child—this is no sight for her!"

But neither his own strength nor hers would have sufficed to have loosened the convulsive embrace with which the girl had again flung her arms about her father, receiving as she did so his last strangled sigh upon her lips, and unconscious that her own wild cry of terror had added a keener pang to the ineffable stroke of dissolution.

A few hours after Philip Methuen arrived. He was profoundly grieved to find himself too late; but his grief was almost purely of an impersonal kind.

Lewis Trevelyan, sick and friendless in the city of his adoption, had first seen Philip in his mother's *salon*, and had been strongly attracted toward him. The former was, or fancied he was, but lightly considered by Mrs. Methuen and her circle of intimates, having in excess the tenacious sensibility which comes from the sense of social declension. He fancied that they all knew his history, more or less—the shifts and economies of his daily life, the isolation and dreariness of his surroundings, and appraised him accordingly. But the sickness, languor, and poverty which repelled others seemed to serve as points of attraction to the grave and noble-looking youth who, he said to himself, might have served as model for the St. George of Donatello. Philip had visited him at every opportunity—had labored for his spiritual enlightenment with a simple directness and ardor which were not to be baffled by Trevelyan's cynicism and indifference; but his efforts had not stopped here. He had been prompt to fulfil any service for him, even those of a humble and distasteful kind, with so much zeal and tenderness, that Trevelyan accepted them, though often with pain and reluctance, as proofs of personal attachment, when they were in reality deliberate acts of religion.

His kindness to Anna had been in its way even greater than his kindness to her father, and had been rendered with that winning grace which appeared to those brought under its influence to be the result of their own

merit or charm, but was, in fact, as much a matter of intention and training as a natural and spontaneous gift.

Neither Richetti nor the gentle old Sister had been able to prevail on Anna to leave her dead father's couch, or even restrain her passionate caresses and lamentations, still less to take the food of which she stood in need. The old doctor, indeed, "who had little *finesse* or facility with womankind," welcomed Philip's arrival with effusion. He relieved him of all sorts of responsibilities, which Richetti had felt reluctant either to accept or refuse. Methuen was able to tell him decisively that the place of interment must be the Protestant cemetery, and to set his mind at rest on the subject of the necessary funds. These points settled, Richetti, with a comparatively light heart, undertook the somewhat vexatious arrangements connected with the funeral. Moreover, one of Philip's first actions had been to press upon the physician what he considered a most munificent recognition of his long professional services, with the assurance of the deep sense of their value which Trevelyan had entertained, and that the sum he asked him to accept was not beyond, but below his merits. In answer to the old man's generous reluctance to deprive the little orphan of so much money, Philip assured him that her interests were fully secured—that she had influential friends in England who would at once take charge of her, and that there was full provision to meet all other claims.

To Anna's bitter disappointment and distress he had not, in his first preoccupation, taken so much notice of her as she had expected. He had, indeed, spoken a few kind words, and gently insisted on her leaving her father's side and taking the cup of chocolate and morsel of bread which old Assunta had brought up for her; but this done, he had whispered to the Sister that it would be well to take her into another room and constrain her to lie down and rest.

Anna's will had hitherto ruled all those who had the care of her, and she never hesitated for a moment to resist with violence the gentle woman's attempt to take her hand and lead her away, and then to rush once more to the side of the dismal couch and fling herself upon the body with renewed kisses and tears.

"I will lie here till they take him from me," she sobbed; "why are you so cruel as to want to part us?"

And then she burst out with a piteous, childish wail: "What shall I do? what shall I do? There is no one left who loves me!"

Philip went up to her, and lifting her up in his strong arms, he pressed her white, tear-stained face against his breast.

"I gave my word to your father, Anna, that I would be your friend as long as I lived—let that comfort you a little!" He stooped over her and kissed her forehead. "My child," he said, "I love you dearly. I used to think you loved me too a little."

He could not, as he well knew, have soothed the passionate heart more effectually. She clung to him with her arms locked round his neck and showered kisses upon his face with almost convulsive ardor. For a few moments he let her have her way, then gently unclasping her hands led her back again to the Sister.

"Take her away now," he said; "for my sake she will do as we wish."

Anna went away submissively and lay down on the bed as desired, and suffered the kind Sister to cover her up warm and put her pillows into place; but when she would have kissed her, she turned away her head with a sharp movement of repulse. She tried to shut out the daylight with her hands clasped over her eyes—to shut out recollection and pain as well. There was only one way to do it: "I love you dearly," she repeated to herself, "I love you dearly. Ah, Philip, I will love you forever!"

Lewis Trevelyan was buried the next day. It was a civil funeral, for he had enjoined Methuen that no religious rites should be held over his body, and such engagements are sacred. But as the young man stood by that unhonored grave, looking through the blinding sunshine on the dusty roads which now encircle the once beautiful little Protestant cemetery, he took a stern satisfaction in the thought of the austerities by which he would seek to atone for this act of loyalty to his friend and disloyalty to his church.

Richetti, looking at the stern face, contented himself with a significant shrug and lifting of the eyebrows: in his estimate all such matters were equal. His sympathies were with Trevelyan, and his sense of young Methuen's bondage to an effete superstition gave unconsciously an air of easy familiarity to his manner when he bade him good-by.

Philip's next duty was to find some escort for Anna. There were nearly always visitors, either English or American, on the wing, who might consent to take charge of her. For the present he had asked the good Sister to take the child back with her to her convent, and to provide her with a suitable outfit, giving her money for the purpose. He also smilingly suggested that if she could make use of the time by introducing into Anna's mind the idea of duty and submission to those in authority, it would be an acceptable and beneficent work. The money thus spent in Trevelyan's behalf was part of Sir Giles's munificent gift to himself; for his examination of his late friend's papers soon showed him that the outstanding claims were more, and the balance at his banker's less, than stated. When everything had been settled and old Assunta's fidelity recognized by a liberal gift, there was little more than thirty pounds left for poor Anna's inheritance, in spite of his own supplementary grants.

It occurred to Philip that he would deposit this sum for her benefit in the English Post Office Savings Bank, so that she might have the little fund to fall back upon in case of some sudden emergency, and could please herself with the sense of importance and independence the arrangement would give.

He deferred the more important transaction of the yearly payment to Mrs. Sylvestre till he found himself in Paris, where he proposed to avail himself of the bankers employed by the College. He had still some anxiety on this point. In the prospect of his becoming a priest he had decided to transfer his annuity under his father's will to Anna, taking his uncle into his confidence and engaging his interest in her behalf. For the present he had still enough money left to send the first half-yearly instalment, which should be the first thing done on reaching Paris.

He gave but little consideration to the alternative of his position, not feeling any doubt that the appointed umpire on the question, the good Archbishop of Paris, would confirm his vocation. He had now been more than a week in Florence, and had not yet seen his mother, having left this painful duty to the last. If it had not been that he hoped she could help him to find a travelling companion for Anna, he doubted whether, on this occasion, he should have visited her at all.

CHAPTER VI.

"I must be cruel only to be kind;
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind."

—*Hamlet*.

"She cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear'd."

—SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. METHUEN occupied a portion of one of the charming modern villas which are built on the hillside just beyond the city, amid the dull verdure of the cypress groves. A picturesque garden shut in the house, but the rooms had no local individuality about them; they were prettily furnished, but after the taste of London or Paris. As Philip entered the *salon*, his mother was in the act of coming through the open window from the garden into the room. She held a bunch of yellow roses in her hand, and was dressed with her usual careful elaboration in an effective dark crimson gown. She was tall and still a beautiful woman, generally considered like her son; and in respect to feature and physique this was true, only to render, to an acute observer, the radical difference of aspect and expression the more striking.

Her color changed as she recognized her visitor, and she betrayed her agitation by dropping some of the flowers she held.

"Is it you?" she said coldly. "It was like your usual civility not to warn me of your return. What is the meaning of it? Have you quarrelled with Sir Giles already?"

Philip came forward, picked up the flowers which she had let fall, and in giving them again into her hand, raised it to his lips. But the movement was a mechanical one—he laid no kiss upon it.

"I have been more than a week in Florence, busy about Lewis Trevelyan's affairs, who, you may probably know, is dead; but I have leave of absence from my uncle. I am come now not only to pay you my respects, but to ask you if you know of any one going to England who will take charge of his daughter. She is to be adopted by an aunt."

"I don't know of any one," she answered impatiently.

"People don't leave Florence, but come to it at this season of the year. And what have you to do with the child? Good heavens!" she added, as a new thought struck her, and starting back as she spoke, "of what did the man die? You surely have not forgotten how nervous and susceptible I am on all points connected with illness; it's as likely as not it was of some infectious disease!"

"Trevelyan died of slow decline. There is no danger," said Philip. He looked away from her as he spoke, lest his face should express too strongly the indignation he felt. He was perfectly aware that her selfishness was so absolute that she would scarcely have given herself the trouble to tax her memory or consult an acquaintance on the subject in which he was interested. He had long since fathomed the shallows of her nature, but until now he had considered there was the one redeeming trait of fidelity to her obligations as wife and mother. She had never loved him—more, she had been the goad and oppressor of his childhood; but he had said to himself, with a pathetic determination to keep some rag of filial feeling, that she was honest and conscientious, and therefore entitled to his respect. It was one of the heaviest blows he had yet sustained, to find that not even this consolation was left to him.

Mrs. Methuen looked at him suspiciously. Whatever were her moral deficiencies, there was no bluntness of her faculty of observation, and she saw a change in her son's bearing toward her.

"What is wrong with you?" she demanded again. "You have been all this time in Florence, and have found no opportunity to come and see your mother! Considering that you are a slave to duty, is it not a little odd that you should have left me up to this moment without news of your uncle's reception? I have looked for a letter in vain."

"I admit I ought to have written—under ordinary circumstances; but I have been deeply engaged. As for my uncle, he has treated me with the greatest kindness and liberality, but no conclusion has been reached about the future."

"No conclusion! I don't understand. You are his heir, I presume? That is a conclusion already reached without your help or his. Are you to live with him? What provision does he propose? Why do you put me

to the annoyance of asking questions it is your business to anticipate? Under any circumstances, now that I fill the place of the dowager of the family, it will be necessary to increase my miserable income."

She laughed softly, and glanced toward a mirror.

"Whenever," answered Philip, "I find myself in possession of Sir Giles's title and fortune, I will not fail to do justice to my mother; but I hope and believe that day is far distant. As long as he lives, I shall never ask him for anything on your account—he knows your requirements better than I do. You have deceived me, but not him."

"Deceived!" she repeated angrily; but a glance at her son's face told her that a show of indignant feeling would be thrown away. "Has the old man been blabbing," she asked insolently, "of the innocent shifts to which my poverty and your necessities drove me? I consider that the little help he gave me was my due, or rather a very meagre portion of my due; and you are very much mistaken if you think I am going to cry *peccavi* because you choose to look upon me as a sinner! After all, it is a world of pities that you should not go into orders—you would have played the part to admiration!"

"Then you will not be displeased to hear that such is still my intention, and that I am on my way to St. Sulpice at this moment, with Sir Giles's consent."

But in fact such an event would have been the destruction of all her plans and hopes. Her ultimate intention was to remove her residence to London (probably to Sir Giles Methuen's long-disused house in South Audley Street, and to establish a lien on his property commensurate with her position as mother of the heir. But this could scarcely be carried out if her son became a priest.

An angry spot burned on her cheeks, and the light of her eyes gathered and kindled. She looked at Philip with an expression in which rage and contempt were equally mixed.

"You are a fool," she exclaimed, "as you always were, and as your father was before you! But you make a mistake if you think I shall suffer myself to be made the sacrifice of your folly. There are ways and means that your simplicity doesn't suspect, to bar your way to the priesthood. I will see Monseigneur myself; I have met him more than once in society, and I know he is a man

of the world, and will hear reason. I will make a personal appeal to Sir Giles. You shall not throw away your chances!"

Here her voice shook a little and tears of mortification softened her eyes. The thought had occurred to her that she might be going too far. If her son were to be in the future the fountainhead of pecuniary supplies, it was impolitic to alienate his good-will; and there was a hardness of manner in his bearing toward her which was quite new and decidedly disagreeable. She liked her own way and was prepared to get it, regardless of what she trampled down or stood upon in the process; but it was disagreeable to her to be on bad terms with those allied to her. Therefore she added, in a more conciliatory tone:

"You must see that you are doing me a grievous wrong!"

"The fact of my becoming a priest," he answered, "will not invalidate my inheritance; and if I live to succeed, I will make you whatever allowance the family solicitors think right. I am come to-day to discuss a painful subject. From a very early age you made me acquainted with the terms of my father's will, and led me to believe that you had always carried them out at considerable sacrifice to yourself. I know now that such has not been the case. Let that pass—a son cannot accuse a mother; but for the future I claim what belongs to me, and I have arranged that my share shall be paid to my credit into the bank."

Mrs. Methuen's face grew almost livid as she listened to him. A feeling of active hate sprang up in her heart as the quiet, deliberate tones fell upon her ears; and she glanced at the beautiful face, cold and resolute as if it had been cut out of stone. Then, taking refuge in the last resource to which a woman turns when she finds herself detected and without excuse:

"You insult me!" she said, with a sob. "Whatever I have done has been done with Sir Giles Methuen's approval. As the head of the family, he volunteered to help me in the way you resent, and sanctioned my taking the benefit of his help. It has always been understood between us that as long as I lived I should continue to receive the full amount left by your father for you and me. At the best it is beggary. Your taking the step you threaten is nothing but a vindictive wish

to punish me for the restraints and grievances of your childhood. I could wish now they had been greater!"

It was certainly to the credit of Philip's self-command that he checked the retort which rose to his lips, but he had schooled himself against any expression of personal feeling. He was, however, equally determined on carrying his point.

"Even my uncle," he answered, "has no power to alter the provisions of my father's will; and the trustees under it, who are, as you know, the solicitors for the Methuen estates, have already written to me on the subject and asked for instructions as to the future. I have already answered their letter. When I received it I had no idea of your feeling in the matter, or that you would be a loser by my taking my own. I imagined that sum had been spent by you upon my education from a child."

"And that I had subsisted all these years on £300 a year?" she asked with a sneer. "But if you do this thing you shall never see my face again!"

He turned a little pale. "Do not say that. I am constrained to do as I say, because it is the only way in which I can carry out an engagement I have made. It is scarcely necessary to tell you that I would not do it for my own personal benefit."

"I am to understand, then, that you rob your mother with a view to enriching some beggar, or making spiritual capital out of it in some besotted form of almsgiving?"

"I have no explanation to give," was his answer. "I am of age, and the money is at my own disposal. One thing I can promise—in no future strait or exigence will I ever ask you for help."

"You would certainly ask in vain," she said, with a little laugh. But she felt daunted by the severity of his self-control, and, to hide her discomfiture, added quickly: "All this time you tell me nothing. I insist upon knowing how things stand between you and Sir Giles. Is it your obstinacy about the priesthood which has led to his washing his hands of you?"

Philip gave her a succinct account of his reception by his uncle and the few circumstances of his visit, and also of the permission he had obtained from him to refer the final decision to the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur d'Enghien.

A peculiar expression crossed his mother's face as she listened.

"I think I begin to understand," she said, "and am a trifle relieved. Sir Giles and the Archbishop are old friends, I know. I was afraid you had broken with your uncle. Under any circumstances, he is pretty certain to make you a handsome allowance—and yet you extort your pound of flesh!"

"If he should, I am prepared to give you back as much as I claim, or even more, if circumstances justify it. In that case you will forgive me, mother?"

"Does it matter?" she asked. "I have never been a fond mother, I own, and it is the glory of saints and priests to hold natural ties cheap. That is why I am almost inclined to allow that you have a vocation. No, Philip," answering the expression of his grave, wistful gaze, "my maternal susceptibilities will never answer to your demands. Still, I am not unwilling to order your room to be got ready."

"It will not be necessary; I leave Florence this evening. To-morrow night I sleep once more under the roof of St. Sulpice."

He got up to take leave.

"You cannot help me in regard to Anna Trevelyan?"

"Not in the least! Put a label round her neck, if a girl of her age can't find her way alone, and don't bring ridicule and trouble on your head by mixing yourself up in other people's affairs. Words fail to express my contempt for the Quixotes of society! Let the aunt you mentioned fetch her or send for her. She is a disagreeable, ill-bred little monkey. Her father was once mistaken enough to bring her here."

"True; that was a mistake" he said, with a smile.

There was nothing more to say, and yet he lingered.

His heart was full in view of the near crisis of his life, and he could not resist the instinctive desire to try and win some touch of sympathy from his mother—because she was his mother—and no failure of hers could break that inexpressible tie.

"I must go," he repeated, "and it is uncertain when we shall meet again. Mother, wish me success!"

"With all my heart," she answered, "but not after your reading of the word. We shall meet again sooner than you expect."

CHAPTER VII.

"When I look back upon my former race,
Seasons I see at which the Inward Ray
More brightly burned or guided some new way;
Truth in its wealthier scene and nobler space
Given for my eye to range, and feet to trace;
And next I mark, 'twas trial did convey,
Or grief, or pain, or strange eventful day,
To my tormented soul such larger grace."

—J. H. NEWMAN.

It would be difficult and perhaps incongruous to describe the feelings with which Philip Methuen found himself once more within the walls of St. Sulpice.

In these days, when faith in God has become a condemnation, and the desire to save the souls of men a proof of deficient culture or narrow brain, the implicit belief and ardent devotion with which he took his part in the high religious festival which fell on the day following his arrival would excite rather ridicule than sympathy.

During the years in which he had been a pupil in the seminary the supreme government lay in the hands of one who regarded the character of its founder with profound veneration, and went nearer to restore the old order and infuse the same spirit of consecration to the religious life than had been done for generations past.

The Abbé de Sève held the belief that to know God experimentally, and then to live for no other object but to bring God and man together in living communion, was the highest condition of being that could be reached. He said to his pupils that this was the priestly function, and that to be worthy of it no discipline was too severe; that it demanded a faculty of self-sacrifice practically without limit, and that therefore every form of selfishness and love of pleasure or ease were mortal enemies to be overcome at all costs. The Church in her tender wisdom stooped to indicate the ways and means best calculated to develop the growth of the spiritual life in the stubborn and sterile hearts of her sons.

To fast and pray, until nature faints under demands too heavy for the body to sustain—to forego the so-called innocent enjoyments of youth in order to serve in loathsome hospitals, or fulfil some prescribed function from which natural pride and fastidiousness recoil—to

refrain from what is desired and accept the unacceptable—were the appointed training for this warfare, and even then the victory was uncertain.

Such teaching is repudiated by the spirit of this age; but may not one be allowed to ask whether Reason herself can deny that it is right, and wise also, to sacrifice a lower for a higher good, and that the faculty of postponing the present pleasure to the future gain is allowed, even by advanced philosophers, to be one of the prerogatives of humanity?

Granting that a man believe in God, as God was interpreted by Christ, and accept the obligations of his service and the incentive of his supreme example, extravagances and fanaticisms so called fall into place.

In all human relations the highest test of devotion is held to be the sacrifice of personal interest and personal pleasure, and it follows logically that the devout Catholic should esteem the endurance of pain, shame, or contradiction, as proofs of his reasonable service.

No prize worth the gaining has ever been won by languid hearts or hands; and if likeness to God is only to be attained by the denial of those tendencies which hamper and slacken our progress, nothing remains but to follow the metaphorical injunction, and cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye, at any cost to our lower nature.

At least such was the view of life and duty which young Methuen had accepted, and which rendered him indifferent to the worldly advantages offered him, and eager to follow the vocation not only of priest but of missionary.

On the second day of his return, which was that fixed for the momentous interview with the Archbishop, he had risen before daybreak and gone into the chapel for purposes of private devotion. As he entered he was surprised and a little confounded to see the Abbé de Sève prostrate before one of the side altars. As Philip hesitated a moment whether to advance or retire, he rose and came toward him.

"We are urged by the same necessity," he said, with a grave smile, laying his hand on the head of the young man, who had knelt to receive the formal benediction. "My prayers have been for you, my son."

"That I may be faithful to the calling on which my heart is set?"

The Abbé looked at his kindling eyes, and his brows contracted a little.

"It is not for the disciple to choose the work his Master would have him to do," he answered, a little coldly.

"Do I presume to choose?" said Philip, humbly. "I think no task can be set me that I should not be willing to perform—as best I can."

"That remains to be proved. Perhaps the hardest task of all is to be passed over without work set or duty prescribed—that of being denied the indulgence of your own will, when you believe that will to be in conformity with the divine will. Go to your prayers, my son, but do not presume to indicate to the Supreme Wisdom the channels in which his grace shall flow."

Philip had become very pale, but he attempted neither question nor reply. His submissive respect broke down the Abbé's intended reserve.

"I stand condemned in my own eyes," he said, with a smile of great sweetness. "Of the family under this roof, Philip Methuen, you have been to me the Joseph; and where the sin of inordinate regard exists, the Divine Wisdom is apt to remove the stumbling-block out of one's path. It is for my chastisement, doubtless, that my son is to be sold into Egypt."

"Is it to be so? Accept my grateful thanks for giving me warning, and for all the goodness of which I am unworthy."

He spoke in a low tone and with no outward signs of agitation, but they were practised eyes which watched him. What could the Abbé say to heal this wounded spirit?

"As long as we both live I am your father and this is your home. I believe the work you may be called to do in the world outside may exceed in hardship and difficulty anything that would have fallen to your lot as priest or missionary even. I know your present repugnance to it, and the heroic youthful dreams which are to be disappointed. I know it, Philip. The probe is never applied except where the flesh is sensitive, and there is no harder word in Holy Scripture than this, 'To obey is better than sacrifice.'"

A few hours later Philip was informed that, instead of coming to St. Sulpice to confer with the neophyte, the Archbishop desired him to wait upon him at his own residence; and there, in an informal way, he told the

young man that, after careful consideration of the matter, he had reached the conclusion that his sphere of duty lay outside the Church. He pointed out in impressive phrases how, in these faithless and degenerate days, more might be done, even for the best interests of religion, by those who had the courage to live the divine life in the thick of an indifferent and scoffing world, than in the close ranks of the clerical army.

He also reminded Philip of the claims his uncle had upon his duty and of the social obligations which lay upon him, and which were recognized by the Church herself, to perpetuate a family which maintained the true faith in the midst of an inimical nation.

"Not," he added, dropping the tone of the ecclesiastic for the man of the world, "that it is necessary to make a religious duty of a foregone conclusion. Love is as much a law of nature as is growth, and, without flattery, you are entitled to expect the best that it can give. Tell my good friend, Sir Giles Methuen, that I shall hold myself at his disposal at any time to pronounce the nuptial benediction."

And so the matter terminated.

On his return to St. Sulpice, a letter was handed to Philip from his uncle, to the effect that he was to remain in Paris, at the seminary if he preferred, until Sir Giles joined him, as he proposed to give himself a holiday.

CHAPTER VIII.

"After April, when May follows
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field, and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dew-drops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture."

—R. BROWNING.

THE village of Skeffington, situated in one of the most charming and fertile of English valleys, and surrounded by some of the loveliest scenery in Dorset, was in itself unsightly and unpicturesque. It stretched its devious way five miles in extent, and, according to its propor-

tions, included as much poverty and vice as could be found in the slums of any great city.

The present-day philanthropists might have culled from its swarming hovels examples of shameless degradation that would at least have equalled in realistic offensiveness anything that the capital could have supplied; and indeed Mr. Sylvestre had been known to say that his experiences as a London curate had been outdone by Skeffington immorality. There was indeed a certain sluggish bovine element about it which distinguished it from the more aggressive forms which vice assumes in crowded centres, but perhaps this made it rather less than more amenable to reformation; and there was also the redeeming physical fact that pure air and fresh water circulated round the miserable, dilapidated cottages, which disgraced landlord and tenant alike.

Board schools (whatever their advantages) had not yet reached Skeffington—not because it was so well served otherwise in this department, but that the inhabitants, headed by their vicar, strenuously resisted the innovation, and had succeeded, by statistics framed with a certain robust imaginativeness concerning the existing means of education, in conveying the belief that it was.

Mr. Sylvestre, to whom a quiet life was the supreme end of existence, naturally found it a matter of importance to be on good terms with the wealthy farmers of the district, and this could certainly not be the case if he had fulfilled his duty in forcing to school the little shock-headed lads who guided the plough in the heavy furrows, trudged alongside the ponderous wagons under the eye and whip of their carter-fathers, or scared the clamorous rooks from the seed-fields in the piercing cold of the early spring mornings. And still greater would have been the opposition of the parents themselves—the terrors of *Schedule B* were as yet undreamt of in this Arcadia.

Mr. Sylvestre's predecessor had been a very old man, who had held the living for close upon fifty years, during the chief part of which he had been the best fox-hunting parson in a county distinguished for such professional hybrids, and had only reluctantly relinquished the saddle when his power to keep his seat failed him. His clerical functions had been restricted to morning service on Sundays, when he always preached

an excellent sermon, selected from some classic theologian on his book-shelves, and read prayers again in the afternoon. He visited the schools once a week, when he invariably commended the diligence of the master, patted the heads of the elder scholars, and presented sugar-plums to the infants. He had a fine person and genial manners, and was by no means unacceptable to parishioners and neighbors. He kept a curate, not of the advanced type, as may be concluded, but a worthy dull man, who married, buried, and baptized for him, went occasionally to take the sacrament to some dying bed when sent for, and catechized the children in the schools.

No finer field for missionary enterprise could have been found than the village of Skeffington, if the right man had been chosen for the work; but the Rev. Herbert Sylvestre was singularly destitute of the spirit of a reformer. Some improvements were inevitably introduced: the pretty old-fashioned Norman church, which had been rigorously closed from Sunday to Sunday, was now thoroughly cleaned and furbished; the neglected churchyard levelled, mown, and planted. The schoolmaster was dismissed, and one a little more in harmony with modern requirements engaged and carefully overlooked. The new vicar thought education his strong point. Sunday-schools were established and pretty well served by the ladies of the village, who found such work an element of interest, with the zest of competition, in their sluggish lives, and also a means of *entrée* to the vicarage.

Social life could scarcely have been on a lower plane than at Skeffington. The wealthy farmers of the neighborhood exchanged civilities—that is, their womankind visited each other, to play tennis and partake of high tea. Dinners were an unknown ceremonial: the men chiefly entertained each other at the two rival hotels at Crawford and Trichester, where the bi-weekly market-feasts were spread.

There was a little nest of rather superior houses gathered round the vicarage, which were occupied by a mixed and rather anomalous class. One was the hereditary property of a single lady, in advanced but vigorous middle life, and who served under Mr. Sylvestre as honorary curate, and helped his wife in the management of the new coal and clothing clubs she had established; another

had been bought by a retired draper from the county town, whose family consisted of himself and his handsome, dashing daughter; and the most charming cottage of all was rented by a young man and his wife, of the name of Mitchell, of apparent education and good manners, but whose antecedents were a little difficult to trace. He declared that he had been induced to take possession of the "delightful shanty" because of the facilities afforded by its numerous outhouses and sheds for the rearing of prize poultry, which was Mr. Mitchell's hobby, or rather one of them, as he was equally devoted to the rearing of wire-haired fox-terriers, and made of both an exceedingly remunerative pursuit.

There was an uncomfortable want of assimilation between these families and the neighboring farmers, as also between both classes and the vicarage—Mrs. Sylvestre being accustomed to draw a hard-and-fast line between herself and her inferiors.

Within the five miles area there were only two gentlemen's houses—that of Methuen Place, which we know, and which was almost out of account as a factor in the social result, owing to the religious faith of its owners—a faith held with almost passionate tenacity throughout the long period of political disability and oppression. It probably arose from this sense of isolation that so many of the men of the family had been students and scholars, living much abroad and contracting many foreign ties of regard.

Sir Giles Methuen himself in his younger days had spent a great part of his time in Paris, where he had made, among others, the ecclesiastical friendship which had stood him in such good stead at the present crisis. The death of his young wife in childbirth, failing health, and the ever-augmenting disappointment in his son, had aged him prematurely and sapped his zest for life. Now he promised himself to live again in his nephew.

The other house was of greater distinction, and belonged to the Sir Walter Earle of whom we have already spoken. But Earlescourt was situated more than five miles from Skeffington, and, with the exception of Methuen Place, the inhabitants were held to be on a different social plane, precluding intimacy with a family which took foremost rank as one of the oldest and richest baronetcies of the kingdom. The only exception was ow-

ing to the allowed eccentricity of the eldest boy, Adrian, who sometimes paid visits to the vicarage in favor of little Dorothy Sylvestre, with whom he had made a chance acquaintanceship during a picnic held in his father's woods, and had conceived so strong a liking for the child as to give proof of it by taking her occasional presents of books, or toys, or fruit. It was on one of these occasions that he had come into contact with Philip Methuen.

Such was the general position of affairs on the day when Anna Trevelyan was to make her first acquaintance with English rural life. Philip Methuen had succeeded with some difficulty in finding an escort for her, and had written to Mrs. Sylvestre requesting that, on the date named, she would be good enough to send a suitable person to meet her niece at the Charing Cross Hotel, and convey her to Skeffington Vicarage.

Mrs. Sylvestre resented this arrangement as a very unnecessary expense, and an act of impertinent dictation on his part; but as she had received by the same post her first half-yearly payment, she thought it better to comply. It was a singular fact that, whenever the question of absence from home arose between the vicar and his wife, it was always decided that he could be much better spared than she. And perhaps it was as well, as far as Anna's comfort went, that it was her uncle rather than her aunt who fetched her home.

But the hour and minute did arrive when she stood in Mrs. Sylvestre's presence, in the colorless room which had witnessed the interview which decided her fate, and was confronted by the cold gaze of the kinswoman who hated her for her father's sake before the feeling of personal antagonism was aroused by the first sight of herself.

"Come here and speak to me, Anna, and I will introduce you to your cousins." The voice was cold and unsympathetic. Anna was weary, excited, and confused by the unfamiliar aspect of everything around her. The three little girls stood together in a shy group without speaking, but gazing at her intently.

She was dressed in a straight black frock, which added to her height and her pallor; and from under her wide-brimmed straw hat masses of somewhat dishevelled chestnut hair fell below her waist; the fine dark eyes looked out before her with an expression at once proud and forlorn. It was all she could do to keep the tears out of them, and her mouth firm and set.

"The child is tired, my dear," interposed the vicar; "let Dolly take her upstairs, and give us some tea as soon as possible. We are here sooner than you expected."

Mrs. Sylvestre's only reply was to repeat her command: "Come here, Anna, I want to speak to you."

Anna moved slowly toward her. Her gait had an ease and dignity which came perhaps from the free life she had led, united to an admirable physical development—perhaps from the unconscious influence of the great works of art amid which she had grown up from infancy. Not a point was lost on the woman who watched her.

"Will you kiss me?" she asked, when the girl had come close up to her, but making no advance on her own part, and with an expression in the prominent blue eyes which might have choked the readiest springs of feeling.

Anna's springs of feeling were not ready. There was a lump in her throat which warned her not to trust her voice to speech.

Her aunt stooped toward her and pressed a light kiss upon her forehead; then, as if to compensate herself for this sacrifice to duty, she said, as she touched the rich masses of her magnificent hair:

"This will never do, Anna! We must get rid of this encumbrance at the first opportunity; no wonder your head aches and you look so pale."

Anna started, and instinctively grasped as much of her floating *chevelure* as her slim fingers could hold.

"Cut off my hair, do you mean!"

There was an accent in her voice that quickened the pulses of Mrs. Sylvestre's heart; it meant defiance and conflict.

"Cut it shorter," she replied, quietly. "Look at your cousins—their hair is pretty and neat, as well as fashionable; yours would want a lady's-maid to keep it in order, which, it is quite obvious, you have never had, nor am I able to give you. But we will talk of this another time. Dorothy, take your cousin upstairs."

Dorothy came timidly forward, and held out a childish, dimpled hand, with a shy smile; but Anna made no response.

"Follow Dorothy upstairs, Anna," said Mrs. Sylvestre, sharply, "and make haste down again. Tea will be ready directly."

Anna obeyed with evident reluctance.

The bedroom into which her cousin took her was a bare, meagre chamber, with two narrow white beds in it, scrupulously neat and spotless, and just as many toilet accessories as necessity required. But the floor was covered with fresh India matting. There was a large curtainless window, but it presented the charm of a deep window-seat, and commanded a fine view of the valley and distant hills.

Anna looked about her, crossed the floor, and sitting down in the window, pulled off her hat and gloves, and then, with an odd sort of deliberation, bowed her face upon her hands and sobbed aloud. Dorothy was greatly distressed. She had been early taught that it was disgraceful to cry, and she was very much afraid of the stranger. She crept up to Anna's side, and laid a timid hand on her arm to attract her notice.

"Don't cry, please," she urged; "your eyes will be red, and mamma will be vexed. I wish we were not all strange to you, Anna; but you will soon get used to us, and we do have nice times in the garden when lessons are done. Look down at the lilacs and laburnum trees. Adrian Earle said you would perhaps never have seen any."

Dorothy's voice was like the cooing of a wood-pigeon. Anna lifted up her tear-stained face, and looked instinctively in the direction indicated.

The delicate perfume of the flowering shrubs scented the evening air, and the golden laburnum chains fascinated her eyes. Then a blackbird suddenly broke the sylvan stillness with the clear melody of his delightful whistle, and a thrush stirred in a thick blossoming thorn-tree, and responded or outvied him with his finer notes. Lewesden and Pilsdon stood out in the blue distance, well defined against the gorgeous sunset sky, and the whole wealth of the typical English landscape lay between them and the vicarage garden.

Dorothy, whom sympathy rendered acute, pressed affectionately against her cousin's side.

"It is very pretty, isn't it?" she said, "though it is not like Florence."

Anna's breast heaved. She turned away from the window and shut her eyes to hide the burning tears which the movement only caused to flow over her cheeks. With her hands clasped together tightly in her lap, and

her graceful head bowed with the weight of her ardent anguish, she looked like some youthful saint anticipating her martyrdom.

There was a knock at the door, and the governess announced that tea was ready.

"I will not come down," said Anna; "send me something to eat up here."

"Eat in your bedroom!" said Dorothy, surprised; "we are never allowed to do that."

"Then I will do without eating. I will not go downstairs—I like this place best."

But when Mrs. Sylvestre heard Dorothy's report, she rose from behind her tea-urn, in spite of a smothered protest from her husband, and going into Anna's room, took the girl by the hand in her cool, strong grasp, and constrained her to rise from her seat.

"Tea is ready," she said, "and you need refreshment. Come with me, Anna. No one stays away from meals unless they are ill."

Anna yielded, and her aunt felt somewhat mollified toward her, as having herself scored the first victory.

CHAPTER IX.

"I think we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God's."

—E. B. BROWNING.

THE next few weeks passed with less friction than might have been expected. The novelty of her surroundings could not but occupy Anna's mind to a degree which prevented perpetual brooding over her dead father and lost freedom. Then she was kept hard at her lessons. The young governess, who had now lived with Mrs. Sylvestre more than two years, was a zealous and conscientious girl, who had well profited by the advanced instruction she had received, and on whom the intelligence and progress of her little pupils reflected infinite credit.

Anna was not long in perceiving that her own ignorance simply astounded her cousins. What did it matter that she spoke Italian with greater fluency than her native language, and could repeat whole pages of the

"*Divina Commedia*" by heart, when she could not write a decent letter in either tongue? She sketched with a power and ease that almost startled her new companions; but she had scarcely heard of the multiplication table, and her spelling was guided by the purest phonetic instincts. Of music she knew absolutely nothing, while able to reproduce by ear any melody she heard once played, and to sing with a voice as pure and true as the birds of the air. History, except as regarded Romanist and Florentine legends, was a fountain whose seal had never been broken—she was absolutely ignorant of her own ignorance. Of the whole circle of human knowledge and possible attainment, she had scarcely touched a single point.

All this was pretty much what Mrs. Sylvestre had expected, and for which she had prepared Miss Sewell; but the latter at least was not prepared for the profound indifference, almost contempt, for learning which Anna Trevelyan showed.

The drudgery of arithmetic, the mental discipline which grammar exacts—even the details of geographical science—were a profound weariness to the girl, who had never yet known what it was to do the thing she was not inclined to do.

"Of what use is it?" she asked. "I do not care about it at all. I know enough to make life pleasant, if only——" And then she stopped short.

"If only?" repeated Mrs. Sylvestre, with a sneer. It was this lady's habit to be continually in and out of her children's school-room.

Anna looked up defiantly; the flush had dried the tears from her eyes.

"If only I had some one I cared for," she added, boldly. "None of you seem to mind about that; but I think it is the only thing that matters!"

Dorothy, who was sitting next her, managed to slip her little palm into her hand. Anna looked at her with a kind of superb tolerance.

"You are a dear little thing," she said; "but I don't mean that sort of feeling. I mean the love one has for those older and better than we are, when we know we should make them happier by growing better and wiser ourselves."

"My dear Anna," said Miss Sewell, smiling, "you would make my heart dance with joy if you would only

learn your lessons better; and, I am sure, your aunt will say the same."

"No, she will not," replied Mrs. Sylvestre, dryly. "Anna must do her duty under other incentives. If, for instance, she will not take the trouble to master that chapter of Collier, which I see still open before her, she must spend the evening over it instead of going out for a walk with the rest."

As she passed out of the room, she stopped beside her niece for a moment and lifted the heavy tresses from her neck. "I am still of opinion this hair ought to be cut off," she remarked; "you would learn much better without it. I shall consult our doctor on the subject."

As the door closed upon her, Anna shut the venerable volume open before her which she had been making some effort to study.

"I hate her," she said, "and she hates me. I will not learn my lesson! As for my hair—not a finger shall be laid upon it!"

She burst suddenly into passionate crying, as was her custom; but it was neither wounded pride nor alarmed vanity which made her weep, but the remembrance of the last touch of her father's hand upon the glories of her head, and his tender admiration of them.

Lessons were just over, so Miss Sewell hastily dismissed the children to the garden, hoping Anna's rash words had escaped them, and then sat down by the girl.

"I do not for a moment suppose that it is a point your aunt will carry against your consent, so don't cry about it. What, dear," remarking the prompt curve of her flexible lip, "am I making some mistake? Then I beg your pardon; only you must not say you won't look at that poor book any more—you could master it in half an hour if you chose—— And if you don't choose, there will be no walk for you to-night in Methuen Park. See what a sunset we shall have, and the wild strawberries are ripe!"

A rapt look came over Anna's face which puzzled Miss Sewell extremely. She knew very little about Anna's past life, Mrs. Sylvestre not approving of raising the best of governesses to the position of confidant.

"Dolly told me her mother never let them walk in the park, however hard they begged."

"That is when Sir Giles is at home," said Miss Sewell, smiling. "Mrs. Sylvestre does not like to encroach on

other people's privacy. He has been staying in Paris, with his nephew, almost ever since the funeral. They are expected home to-morrow."

Anna made a movement of eager speech, then closed her lips; and a flush passed over the fine pallor of her skin, which seemed like a transfiguration.

"I will go," she said. "You are right when you say I can learn my lesson if I choose."

An hour later Miss Sewell and her pupils passed through the vicarage gates on their way to Methuen Park. It was a two-mile walk, as we know; but the season was at the prime of its summer glories, and the children, eager to make up for the long day's close confinement by free exercise of voice and limb, ran and leapt and laughed with perpetual divergences into the teeming hedgerows in pursuit of flowers and ferns, dropped almost as soon as gathered. All at least except Anna, who, having learnt her distasteful task, was now walking at Miss Sewell's side, with pale cheeks and gleaming eyes—signs of some deep inward excitement.

Just as they had reached the gate which divided the park from the public road, a young man stepped forward and opened it from the inner side. The children looked shyly at him; Miss Sewell thanked him, with a smile, and he, with a careless courteous recognition, singled out Dorothy alone for the honor of his greeting.

"Well met!" he said. "I was deadly tired of myself and my book." He glanced toward a near tree, where an open volume was lying on the grass, and a horse quietly grazing with its bridle fastened by a stake to the ground. "I am delighted to meet a friend. May I join you, Miss Sewell?"

"If you like to do so; but the children are going to pick strawberries, and Dolly always knows best where to find them. I am afraid you won't care for that."

"I would much rather stay with Mr. Earle, if he will let me," said Dolly, anxiously; but this Miss Sewell overruled. She knew the children would be expected to produce proofs of their industry, and also that Mrs. Sylvestre looked very coolly upon the odd friendship between her little daughter and Sir Walter Earle's heir: had he extended it to the family it would have been another matter.

"Run on with the little ones, Dorothy, and come back when you have filled your baskets." And Dorothy, with

a wistful look at the young man, who only replied to it by a careless smile, was compelled to obey.

Adrian meanwhile dropped to Miss Sewell's side, and cast a swift, inquiring look toward Anna. He was very much struck by the tall, pale, picturesque-looking girl, whose air and expression seemed involuntarily to convey the idea of aloofness and isolation. It was not to be supposed that he was in ignorance of the small politics of the locality; and falling back on the gossip which had reached him, he came to a right conclusion about Anna's identity.

"Will you not introduce me to Mrs. Sylvestre's niece?" he asked.

His smile was so sweet and manner so soft that Anna, abstracted as she was, turned her eyes fully upon him.

"My name is Anna Trevelyan," she said, while poor Miss Sewell was hesitating to find a way of escape out of her difficulty—"you can tell me yours."

This girl, without a penny, spoke and looked like some young captive princess. Adrian was still more amused and interested. He stooped to pick a particularly fine globe of clover which caught his eye in the grass, and on recovering the erect position, managed to bring himself to Anna's side.

"I am Adrian Earle," he said; "but you will never have heard of me! Indeed, very few people have. I live a harmless, quiet life, something like a toad in a hollow tree. It is seldom I go so far afield as I have done to-day." Then, glancing at Miss Sewell, he added, "I felt a little surprise at recognizing your party, and thought you must all be playing truant. How is it the veto is removed which makes Methuen Park forbidden ground?"

"That is only when Sir Giles is at home. I thought you knew our domestic code pretty well by this time, Mr. Earle."

"It is precisely because I know it so well——" began Adrian, when, to his astonishment, he felt a sudden stealthy grip on his arm from Anna's thin but vigorous fingers, and meeting her eyes, read in them a mute, passionate entreaty, which arrested the words on his tongue.

"Can we see the house yet?" she asked in an eager whisper. "I am so anxious to see the house!" And it seemed to him as if she wished to press forward and leave Miss Sewell behind. Both curiosity and good feeling impelled him to humor her: there was a look of pur-

pose in her face which meant more than any childish whim.

They were well within the precincts of the park by this time, which showed a prospect the young Florentine had never seen before. But Anna had no eyes for the wide stretch of vivid elastic turf, or for the gigantic boughs and massive shade of the majestic elm-trees, which were the pride of the county as well as of the family.

The shimmer and sound of the lovely little stream which brawled at their feet, and was diverted into fountains and fish-pools in the gardens of the house, were equally disregarded by her—all her faculties seeming to be concentrated on the discovery of the dwelling.

"We are close upon it," said Adrian, kindly, "though it lies too low to get a view of it where we stand. A few steps higher and you will be able to see it."

He offered his hand to help her up the slight ascent, for in her eagerness she had stumbled and slipped, and in another moment Anna saw the venerable gray-stone mansion lying at her feet, its old-fashioned gardens now dappled and gay with summer flowers, and the pretty Italian fountain, with its gold and silver fish in the cool basin below leaping in the sunset light. She stood gazing at the charming picture with a breathless interest which completely puzzled her companion.

"Do you like it so much?" he asked, smiling. "It is a nice place enough in its way, and in better order just now than I ever saw it before; but that must strike you as a very small way after your Florentine palaces, Miss Trevelyan."

Anna made an impatient movement, as if what he was saying was quite beside the point; and at the same moment Miss Sewell was called away by a sudden contention which reached her ears from her little pupils in the distance.

Anna drew a breath of relief. "Oh, how glad I am she is gone! You don't understand, of course, but I will explain. *I know they are there*—came home yesterday—and I was dreadfully afraid Miss Sewell would find it out. If she had, she would have turned back and gone home again, or at least another way. You very nearly spoilt all!"

"Very nearly, indeed," he answered, "as I had not the faintest idea there was anything to spoil; but——" he

hesitated from a feeling of reluctance to question closely this pale strange girl, who was giving her confidence to a stranger. He contented himself with adding: "Can I help you in any way?"

"Show me how to get down to the house," she answered. "But I see. That narrow road winds down to the little bridge and leads into the court-yard. But where is the entrance-gate? I see no portico."

"The chief entrance is on the other side—we cannot see it where we stand. But may I venture to ask you a question?"

She nodded impatiently, still keeping her strained attention on the house below.

"Are not you Mrs. Sylvestre's niece and ward? and do you not know she would be very much annoyed if you were to go inside the walls of Methuen Place? What do you want there? I ask you again, can I help you in any way?"

"What do I want?" she repeated, turning upon him a look so wild and forlorn as to be almost startling. "I want Philip Methuen. I want to tell him I cannot live with my aunt, and he must take me away. I am more miserable than I am able to say—miserable all day, miserable all the long nights through, when I lie awake wishing I were dead. I mean what I say. I wish, I wish I were lying in the warm earth, close to my father's side, in dear old Florence! That ends all—he used to say so—but"—with a fierce strangled sob—"I am alive! and I cannot go on living as I am. Philip will help me."

Adrian felt a pang of keenest sympathy. His knowledge of Mrs. Sylvestre and Anna's free betrayal of her own passionate nature made the situation quite clear to him: she must have known Methuen abroad. But he could not let this wild, self-willed girl commit an absolute breach of propriety, and one for which she would probably be severely punished.

"It is very hard," he said; "but you do not quite know how stiff and formal our English ways are, and as there are no ladies at Methuen Place, it would be thought strange for you to call there alone. Besides, I am afraid it will only make matters worse between you and your aunt if you appeal against her authority to strangers."

"Strangers!" repeated Anna, with a smile full of passionate meaning. "I am not afraid of Mrs. Sylvestre, or if I were, Philip will take care she does not hurt me."

Every day I have questioned the servant about his coming home, and made her promise to tell me the truth. Without the hope of seeing him, do you think I would have endured my prison life at the vicarage? Now he is come and I am safe—Philip!”

She spoke the name with an accent so tender and caressing as to call up a smile to the young man's lips. Was she child or woman? It was difficult to pronounce exactly about her age, she looked so different from other girls, and—how beautiful she was!

But all this was for further consideration; the next thing to be done was to summon Miss Sewell and prevent the impending catastrophe. He looked round to see how far off she was, and at the same moment one of the long windows of the dining-room of the house was thrown open, and two gentlemen stepped out upon the terrace. Quick as thought Anna recognized one of them as Philip, and scarcely less swift was her obedience to the overmastering impulse which prompted her to rush to his side.

Before Adrian could guess her intention, or prevent it, her flying feet had carried her too far for pursuit, if pursuit had been desirable. He watched her with mixed amusement and concern. So swift and sure were her movements, that the downward path was traversed and the rustic bridge crossed almost as fast as his eye could follow her. At this point she was close upon the courtyard of the house and opposite the principal entrance.

Anna glanced up at the firmly closed and stately portal, and then perceived that beyond the paved enclosure only a low stone parapet divided the flower-garden, on which she had been looking down, from the park boundary.

In another moment she had sprung lightly over the barrier before the astonished eyes of Sir Giles Methuen, had rushed, flushed and panting, to Philip's side, and, perhaps because too breathless for words, had caught his hand in both hers and covered it with kisses.

After the first shock of surprise Sir Giles formed a fair guess of the situation, and watched his nephew with an intense inward sense of amusement.

There are perhaps few things which titillate more agreeably the cynic's sense of humor than to see a grave man placed in a ridiculous position; and there was an obvious incongruity between the reticence of Philip's

character and demeanor and the unrestrained ardor with which this beautiful girl had all but flung herself on his breast and was still pouring forth words of rapturous greeting in the caressing diminutives of her native Tuscan. Indeed, her speech was too rapid and colloquial for the old baronet to follow, very much to his disappointment; and he was equally baffled by his nephew's prompt and fluent response.

Philip, catching the mocking expression of his uncle's face, had felt for a moment embarrassed, but it only served to increase the air of tender respect with which he took Anna's eager hands in his, and, in response to the piteous expectancy of her face, stooped and kissed her forehead. Then leading her up to his uncle, he introduced her to him as Lewis Trevelyan's daughter, and his own little sister by adoption.

Sir Giles received her with a delightful old-fashioned courtesy. He made her sit down and rest in a comfortably padded old garden seat close to the fountain, and sent Philip back into the dining-room for a cushion for her feet and a plate of peaches. He encouraged her to talk to him freely about the matter of which her heart was full; and though a sense of gentlemanly duty prevented any expression of his personal antipathy to Mrs. Sylvestre, it was evident to Anna that he was greatly in sympathy with the spirit which animated her passionate complaints.

On the other hand, Philip, having heard all that the girl had to say, and judged it impartially, came to the conclusion that there was very insufficient ground for suspecting Mrs. Sylvestre of actual injustice or cruelty, and did his best to mitigate her sense of injury. He saw clearly that, as they were respectively situated, the vicarage at Skeffington was the best asylum for Anna; and he knew her undisciplined nature well enough to be quite sure that even judicious restraint would be resented as a wrong.

He maintained this view with so much firmness that Anna's indignation was soon diverted toward himself, and she interrupted her appeals to the more impressionable Sir Giles with violent reproaches for his son's cruelty and faithlessness.

At this point the difficulty of the situation was increased by a servant announcing a visit from poor Miss Sewell, who had seen no other way out of her serious

dilemma than braving the lion in his den, and reclaiming her pupil at the hands of the terrible old baronet himself.

Sir Giles, on receiving her name, rose and went to her immediately, and in five minutes' gracious intercourse had wiped off the accumulated aspersions and prejudices of years. Her prayer was that Sir Giles would so exercise his authority as to constrain Anna to return home with her at once. The other children she had been obliged to leave in the park under Mr. Earle's kind protection.

"Oh, no; ten thousand thanks! but they must not be fetched into the house." It was very late already, and she was frightened at the probable consequences of Anna's behavior.

That the girl must go back to her aunt's house that night, Sir Giles allowed to be necessary, whatever future arrangements might be made; and he conducted Miss Sewell into the garden, that she might resume her control over her pupil.

As they approached, they saw that Anna was still sitting in her chair, weeping bitterly, with her face hidden in her hands, and that Philip, who had probably exhausted both argument and entreaty, was standing at some little distance from her in evidently perplexed, if not displeased, silence.

Sir Giles smiled to see how his face brightened at Miss Sewell's approach. "I think," he said, introducing her, "I have brought you a friend in need."

Philip looked at her for a moment with penetrating attention.

"Tell me," he asked, "the truth about Anna so far as you can without being disloyal to Mrs. Sylvestre. In one word, is it necessary for her welfare and happiness that her friends should take her away?"

Miss Sewell answered with a courageous frankness which astonished herself, but which Philip's look and manner evoked.

"Mrs. Sylvestre was cold, even severe, but her niece was difficult to control or win; and, on the other hand, the children were affectionate and lovable, her uncle very kind to her, and she herself deeply anxious to win the girl's love and confidence. She doubted if Anna would be better off elsewhere."

Anna had raised her head at Miss Sewell's approach,

and had listened to what passed with a scornful and resentful air.

"Thank you, I am quite satisfied," Philip had answered; and then he turned toward Anna, picked up the little black silk handkerchief she had thrown off in her excitement, which had been tied round her throat, and held out his hand to raise her from her seat.

"Come," he said gently, but with an unmistakable air of authority, "we must not keep Miss Sewell waiting."

Anna rose slowly and looked defiantly into his steady eyes.

"You send me back to prison and to misery, while you yourself have everything that heart can wish! My aunt will punish me as if I were a child when I get back. Do you know how she will punish me? She will cut off my hair!"

The inflection of the voice, the gesture with which she grasped her heavy tresses, had that touch of exaggeration which mixes something of the comic with the tragic element of a situation, and in so doing aids rather than destroys its pathos.

There was not a gleam of amusement in Philip's face.

"At least," he answered, "I will not send you back alone, but go with you; and we will both see Mrs. Sylvestre, and make her understand that, under any circumstances, her displeasure must never take that form. I think I shall be able to persuade her that it was the most natural thing in the world that you should come and see your old friend; and I will do my best to get leave to pay you a visit now and then. I had made up my mind to go and see you to-morrow."

"And you will not come now? O Philip, must you punish me too?"

"I will come if allowed. The sooner we go and ask the better. Are you ready, Miss Sewell?" And then in a lower tone to Sir Giles, "I have taken your permission for granted. I could scarcely leave Anna to bear the brunt of her aunt's displeasure alone."

"It seems you are likely to meet Adrian Earle in the park, playing nursery-maid to Mrs. Sylvestre's brood. Send him down to me. He is always amusing, and I will keep him till you return. It is as well you and he should be friends."

CHAPTER X.

"The truth is, youth
I want, who am old and know too much;
I'd catch youth: lend me sight and touch!
Drop heart's blood when life's wheels grate dry!"

—R. BROWNING.

WHEN does life redeem its promises?

Sir Giles Methuen had said to himself over and over again that were relief possible from the miserable anxieties which had racked his peace and made the future formidable, he should be restored to health both of body and mind. Under his sharp and cynical temper he had a warm heart, which had received a good many severe shocks in his passage through life, and now in this halcyon season, so unexpectedly granted, he was quite prepared to receive his nephew with almost paternal regard.

It must, however, at the same time be allowed that he was not only affectionate but exacting, with a morbid tendency to doubt his own capacity for being loved. He was fully prepared to adopt Philip as a son, but was the young man disposed to look upon him as a father? Was there not, under the surface of his considerate kindness and obedience, a current of determination and independence which fretted his sense of security?

To go back a little. When Sir Giles had joined Philip in Paris he had been quite prepared to encounter even passionate protests and reproaches for the part he had played, and was not so much relieved as baffled by his nephew's studious avoidance of all controversy.

His dutiful attentions to himself, and the apparent absence of temper or resentment, did not deceive his acute observation, and at last he rushed into the subject.

They had taken the train to Fontainebleau, and were sitting under the shade of some of the prodigious oaks in that most picturesque of forests, watching the decline of the midsummer sun, when Sir Giles said suddenly:

"*Apropos* of nothing, Philip, I would much rather you made a clean breast of your feelings in regard to our good Archbishop's decision—that is, I should like to know exactly how much you were vexed and disappointed. I remember how sure you felt of the result, and am willing to own that you accept your hard fate better than I expected."

"That is just it. I do accept it, so to my mind there is nothing more to be said."

He looked straight before him, as if watching the delicious play of light and shade in the sylvan alleys which stretched on all sides of them, but resolutely avoiding the old man's wistful gaze.

"So I shall never be bothered by complaint or regret in the future? or perhaps you are already persuaded there is nothing to regret?"

Philip was silent for several minutes. His gaze was still fixed, but it was easy to see the concentration was inward rather than outward; while the deepening curves of the subtle but finely moulded lips and of the lines of the sharply defined brows testified that apathy at least had nothing to do with his composure.

"Don't you remember," he answered at last, "how freely I expressed myself on this subject when there was yet a chance of influencing your mind? My opinions, my feelings, if you like, are precisely the same now as they were then, but no good can come of talking about them. I said I would yield implicit obedience to the decision reached by Monseigneur d'Enghien, not knowing that it was a foregone conclusion. Excuse my saying I look upon this as having been a trap set for my inexperience, but the unwary must suffer for their unwariness."

"Commend me to a saint for a special gift of provocation!" cried Sir Giles, testily. "You would give me to understand that, though you bear no malice, this little transaction at starting will be an effectual barrier between us! I was fool enough to think that you and I might have stood in some measure in the relation of father and son, outside the range of pounds, shillings, and acres."

"No father shall be able to reckon more surely upon a son's duty."

"Duty? Ay, I might have known all natural spontaneity would be kneaded into that nauseous stuff with you! I decline the tribute of your duty! *Duty* I can get by paying for it, and I won't accept it at your hands. I see I have still a crook in my lot, the only difference being that the twist is in the reverse direction. Come, it is time to be going."

He stood up impatiently as he spoke, poking the ground viciously with his stick.

"It will be quite as well," he added, bitterly, "that

you and I should not live always together. Your confounded coolness aggravates my temper, and I put myself at a disadvantage with a youngster. Am I to understand that you will take your quiet revenge by throwing away the splendid chances I am able to offer you?"

"Understand nothing but that your way is mine for the future."

"So far good," answered Sir Giles, a little mollified; "but I may as well warn you. No Methuen for many generations past has been a happy or successful man. It may be you will spoil your life somehow, like the rest of us."

"Very likely. I am not at all sanguine about the future."

"But I am!" responded Sir Giles with illogical asperity. "To-morrow night—you have not forgotten, I suppose?—we are to meet Lord Sainsbury at the embassy, and my heart is fixed on his offering you the post of his private secretary. If he should, it is understood between us that you accept it. It is the finest possible opening for a political career, which I am bent on your following. You will not disappoint me, Philip?"

"If I do," was the answer, "it will be my misfortune, not my fault."

"Once more, good. You are prepared to try, and the first step is to please the great man. I think he has every disposition to be pleased. I need not caution you against putting yourself too forward: wait to have your opinions elicited, and receive his as if they were final. If you are quite of another mind, it is not absolutely necessary that you should let the fact appear. Time and society will make wonderful changes in your present beliefs."

"But on some very fundamental points I find Lord Sainsbury's beliefs and mine are identical."

"Eh? You are already acquainted with his opinions?"

"I have taken up Hansard the last few mornings and have been looking over his speeches. If he should only like me half as well as I like him—that is, if his words are to be trusted——"

"Come, this really looks healthy! He is a fine fellow, though a bit of a bigot; but you are of the right stuff of which disciples are made. You would never take the initiative, Philip, but docility is a far more serviceable quality. I consider the first step gained already."

Sir Giles was radiant, and still more elated when, at the

close of the next day's momentous entertainment, the good-natured ambassador made opportunity to tell him before he left that Lord Sainsbury was much taken by Philip, and that he was sure of the appointment if he would make up his mind to accept it.

"In short, Sir Giles," he concluded, "your nephew strikes us both as specially trained to suit Lord Sainsbury's purpose. He has not only the necessary acquirements to a degree few young men of his age possess, but I can see he has the rare gift of obeying orders. Then, again, he has the looks and manners which are indispensable to a man of Sainsbury's fastidiousness. Tell him from me his career is already made, only—he must marry the right woman!"

"It will not be necessary for him to do that just at present. He was, as I told you, brought up for the priesthood, and the notion of marriage is disagreeable to him."

The ambassador raised his eyebrows a little.

"That goes for what it is worth! At all events, don't let him fall in love with the wrong one." And they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XI.

"How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does!"

—R. BROWNING.

SIR GILES began to take heart of grace again. The nephew, whom he had feared might be recalcitrant, was amenable enough so far as outward submission went. He had consented to forego what he considered his vocation, and to adopt a profession for which he had professed a positive repugnance. Let sleeping dogs lie! Was it of any great account if, at the bottom of his heart, lay the same inclinations and aversions still?

They came home to Methuen Place under the arrangement that Philip was to consider himself his own master until Parliament met again in the spring, the present session having nearly run its course. Lord Sainsbury, who knew all the family circumstances, had been reluc-

tant to deprive the old man at once of his nephew's society, and had also suggested that the interval might be well spent by him in the study of English politics and constitutional history—subjects which had been undeniably neglected in the young man's education.

Philip Methuen, to whom stringent mental occupation was a necessity as well as a duty, followed this advice so sedulously that Sir Giles began to look about for salutary diversions for him.

There were Adrian Earle and the Earlescourt circle at command, but the young man himself was so uncertain and crotchety that he placed very little reliance on this resource, and was agreeably disappointed when he found that he and his equally difficult nephew seemed to get on very well together. Sir Giles would have said there was scarcely a sympathy in common between the learned young recluse of Issy and St. Sulpice and the indolent eccentric Englishman who had just finished his terms at Brazenose, where, to the vexation of friends who knew his powers, he had barely secured his degree, refusing to attempt to win the honors which were certainly within his easy reach.

Their friendship, however, prospered so far that Adrian was constantly at Methuen Place; and on the return of Sir Walter Earle from town with other members of his family, Philip accepted a fortnight's invitation to Earlescourt, Sir Giles consenting to break his habits of seclusion and join the party for the last two days of his visit.

"By that time," he said to his nephew, "you and Honor Aylmer will probably be sworn friends. She is a fine girl, and every one likes her; moreover, you will see her to advantage as mistress of the house—poor Miss Earle being kept in town through the illness of some very dear relative. Of course you know that Miss Aylmer is an heiress in her own right, with lacs of rupees for her portion—her father having been the governor of some obscure but prolific Indian province. Also you know she is engaged to marry Adrian Earle as soon as she is of age. Of course he has talked to you about her?"

"He has told me about as much as you have just now said."

"There is another member of the family who will not probably make friends with you so easily—he is a miserable creature! I often pity Sir Walter Earle. It is a

terrible trial to be the father of deformity, be it physical or moral."

"And what of the miserable creature's own share of the trial? Is not that sharper still?"

"I never took kindly to idiots or cripples," returned Sir Giles, sharply, "and when they are spiteful and ill-conditioned, I consider myself excused from pitying them even."

Philip Methuen's acquaintance with the member of Sir Walter Earle's family thus characterized by his uncle took place sooner than he expected.

On the day of his arrival, Sir Walter and Honor Aylmer were not at home to receive him, for no particular hour had been fixed, and the servant who admitted him, laboring under some mistake, said that Mr. Earle was in his brother's room, and had desired that if Mr. Methuen came he should be asked to join them there.

Having taken him to the door of the apartment, the man knocked and retired; and Philip, in answer to a shrill "Come in!" opened it and entered. It was a chilly day in early August, but the temperature of the room was that of a hot-house, and lying on a pile of cushions, in the full focus of the blazing hearth, with his head receiving the direct rays of the fire, lay the blighted cadet of the house, the deformed cripple, Oliver Earle. The deformity was not apparent as he lay with a covering over his limbs; but the sharp features and eager, wistful expression of the boy, who was seventeen but looked younger, told the unmistakable tale of lifelong and unaccepted suffering. His position was such that he faced the door, and, on seeing a stranger enter, he uttered a sudden cry like a hurt animal, and drew the silken coverlet up to his eyes.

"Go away!" he almost shrieked. "You have made some mistake. Go away this moment! How dare you stare at me?"

His eyes blazed as he spoke: one might have thought he was some couchant creature about to spring on the intruder.

Philip closed the door softly behind him, and advanced a little farther into the room.

"It is true," he said, "I have made a mistake. I expected to find Adrian Earle here, but I believe you are his brother. If so, why don't you give me the welcome I have missed from him?"

He looked down at him quietly, without curiosity and without pity, and his voice had an inflection which could scarcely fail to touch the sensitive ear and heart.

"Let me stay," he added; "every one else is out, and I am quite a stranger."

Oliver remained silent, looking hard at him, then said moodily, "Stay if you like," and turned, though the effort was painful, on his other side, so as to have his back to the new-comer.

Philip surveyed the room. "You are lodged like a prince," he said. "Have I your leave to examine the things lying about?" There was an inarticulate sound for answer.

It was a large apartment, with a bay-window so deep and wide that the recess formed a little chamber of itself, and the broad seat below, from which a delightful view of the pleasure-grounds could be gained, was stuffed and padded so as to form a luxurious couch. All the other couches and seats which stood about the room seemed each to have been made with some special adaptation to an invalid's comfort, and had that variety of little tables in convenient neighborhood which is one of the happiest departures of modern taste. Book-cases full of costly volumes, and cabinets fresh from the hands of Reisener and Gouthière, and stuffed with curiosities from all parts of the world, looked to superb advantage against a wall hung with modern tapestry that might almost have vied with the products of Indian looms in quaintness of design and harmony of color. The draperies of the windows, and the wide curtain which hung before the door, as well as the covers of chairs and sofas, were of the same fabric, duly subordinated in tint and pattern; and refinement was added to luxury by the water-color pictures on the dividing panels of the wall, and by the fantastic *jardinières*, full of sweet-smelling flowers and exotic ferns.

Philip deliberately inspected the drawings and elaborate *bric-à-brac* on all sides, partly with an interest which came from lifelong acquaintanceship with art under all its forms, and partly in order to reassure the shrinking and unfriendly little figure moving restlessly beneath its covering.

There was a half-done painting on an easel in one corner, with all the artist's litter strewn about, as if the work had been suddenly interrupted; and one of Col-

lard's small grand pianos stood open, with a book of Chopin's waltzes on the desk. On a table, larger and more serviceable than the rest, was heaped a pile of lesson-books, among which he distinguished a beautiful copy of the "Iliad," and another of the "Divina Commedia," the margin of which was covered with pencil-notes.

He took up the latter instinctively, saying, with a smile, "It is pleasant to recognize old friends;" and then, as he stood, began to read the words aloud at which the book stood open:

"Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli
Del Casentin discendon guiso in Arno,
Facendo i lor canali e freddi e molli."

The boy listened intently, then said moodily, "Honor does not read like that."

"Then so much the worse for Honor!" said a fresh young voice; and Miss Aylmer, still in her riding-habit, and with her soft felt hat shading her sweet face, stood smiling in the issue of the open door, the heavy curtain of which she upheld with her raised arm, making a charming picture. Philip dropped the book in his movement of surprise; he had not heard the door open.

"I am afraid you have not been well treated, Mr. Methuen," she added, coming forward with the free, firm step and graceful bearing which are distinguishing characteristics of the well-born, fine-natured English girl. "Sir Walter did not expect you so soon, and Adrian set out to meet you hours ago, and must have missed you, as we warned him he would. I am so glad Oliver has been friendly!"

Her voice took a sweeter tone as she pronounced the name, and the animation of her face softened when she looked at him.

"I have not been friendly! He had no business to come in here, but I don't mind so much now. Make haste and take off your things. I thought you were never coming home!"

She promised and left the room, reflecting that though the stranger had shown neither awkwardness nor embarrassment, he had scarcely spoken, and repeating to herself, with a touch of humor on her lips as she recalled Oliver's objection to the perfect enunciation:

"Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli."

Shall we look at her for a moment as she stands in her

thick white gown before the glass, waiting while her maid ties the soft myrtle-colored sash round a waist slim with the bewitching slimness of girlhood, but exhibiting the curves of nature, not the false roundness of the milliner's ideal? She is tall for a woman—too tall, her female friends are apt to say; but this defect, if it be one, can well be borne when allied to perfect symmetry and the elasticity of vigorous health, and sustained by the port almost of a goddess. Many faces might be more strictly beautiful, perhaps, but her complexion was touched with the finest tints a brunette can desire. Truth and honor sat on her brows; humor and sweetness in charming wedlock lurked in the corners and moulded the lines of the beautiful lips; and never did a less selfish and more loyal heart beat than that which throbbed in Honor Aylmer's bosom, and lighted the tender passion of her face.

When she came back to Oliver's room—and leaning over the boy to resettle his pillows, showed in every look and tone an almost maternal kindness—Philip Methuen watched her with a close observation of which he was scarcely himself conscious.

She seemed to him the verification of some vague ideal which, until he saw her, he did not know he had ever conceived.

"I have been talking to Philip Methuen a little," said Oliver, with that spice of spitefulness which comes of such experiences as his, "and he does not like Chopin at all, and thinks your picture badly done."

"Oh!" exclaimed Honor, almost with an accent of pain. "I dare say such a critic as Mr. Methuen may think my picture bad; but Chopin!"

Philip looked at her and smiled with that impersonal air which gave at once an individuality and a distinction to his manners, as the absence of eagerness and self-assertion invariably does.

"That I do not like Chopin is quite true, Miss Aylmer; but you will scarcely believe that I had the impertinence to condemn your painting?"

"But you said," shrilled Oliver, lifting himself a little on one elbow in order to look into his face—"you said—what was it you said?—that the composition was contradictory. In a good picture, of course, the composition is not contradictory!"

Honor blushed a little. "I am afraid that I must agree

with Oliver, that you meant that it was bad, if that was what you said; but I am quite prepared to prove that I think your criticism worth listening to."

She turned and went toward the easel, Philip following her.

It was a landscape, representing sunrise over some Eastern clime, and although unfinished, was, so far as it went, a more than commonly good specimen of amateur work.

"I flattered myself it was clever," said Honor, with a sigh.

"It is clever," replied Philip; "and when you draw from nature your work must be very good indeed."

"And how do you know this is not drawn from nature? Many girls have travelled in Africa."

"Then if you have, Miss Aylmer, you must have painted this after your return. To speak like a pedant, the fauna and flora are not in keeping—not possible, in fact. Such trees do not grow side by side, and those animals, spirited as they are, do not live in the same latitudes."

"Ah, that comes from drawing in blind confidence upon an ill-educated fancy! I see you have not the least idea of the subject of my picture—it is the Happy Valley of Rasselas—and I took infinite pains to gather together in one every notion which Oliver or I could evolve of Abyssinian glory and beauty."

"Those are the ventures which only amateurs have the courage to make; but the talent which is a little astray here is quite enough to fit you for the legitimate exercise of art to a degree few of your age—I need not speak of sex—could hope to reach. You have a great gift."

"Never was the *amende honorable* more generously made!"

"You are mistaken in saying that. I am so little a man of the world, that I always mean what I say."

They were interrupted by a fretful voice from the rug.

"There, there! that sort of talk worries me dreadfully. I want you to play something, Honor. I am all wrong to-day. I should like what he dislikes."

"You will not mind?" she asked, smiling. And sitting down at once to the piano, began to play one of Chopin's most subtle and intricate waltzes with admirable expression and skill, Oliver following every phrase with eager, nervous fingers.

While she was playing, Adrian opened the door and

came in. He looked pale and tired, but his face brightened on seeing Philip. At the same time he made a sign to keep silence, and sinking down on the couch nearest to him, was presently as much absorbed as his brother in the music.

As Honor rose and turned round to speak to him, he said:

"Don't ask me any questions, you know my abhorrence of the note interrogative! I have missed my man, and tired myself to death, but I am all right now. Sit down and go on again—you seem to play better than ever, and do credit to the lessons in town. When Chopin is rendered by such fingers as yours, I am in heaven!"

"Then it must certainly be the heaven of Mahomet," said Philip.

"What!" cried Adrian, "is there an *Index Expurgatorius* for musicians as well as writers? What is wrong with Chopin?"

"To my mind he is of the earth earthy, weaving his spells out of the lower elements of human nature, and therefore false to the end and aim of true art."

"Ah," returned Adrian, with his delicate smile, "you are too much in advance of us! So far as Chopin goes, we three are in the first stage of innocence, unable to discern the evil from the good. There are subtleties of intuition imbibed at St. Sulpice which leave Oxford far behind."

Philip colored. "You must not believe that all I say and do is derived from St. Sulpice; nor that it is a cloister, as you seem to imagine. Besides, I have gone occasionally into society, both in Paris and Florence."

"We have no difficulty in believing that; and you deceive yourself prodigiously, my good fellow, if you fancy that your personality is strongly suggestive of the cloister. You are an enigma which Honor and Oliver will help me to solve. By the way, I am so glad you have got over your first introduction to my brother."

"I am afraid that it arose from a mistake, and that he has not forgiven me."

"It was a mistake," said the boy; "but I am not sorry now. I think I shall be able to get on with you—you did not stab me with your pity. And you told Honor her picture was wrong."

"And that is a claim upon your gratitude when Miss Aylmer is so good to you!"

"It is a claim upon my confidence; every one else tells her she is perfect."

"And so she is," said Adrian, looking at her tenderly. "I should have to reflect all night to discover a fault in Honor."

At that moment the girl's name was called in the hearty, ringing voice of the master of the house. She rose eagerly to obey the summons.

As she passed Adrian, she whispered, "Spare me to Mr. Methuen! He may be of Oliver's temper, and hate what is overpraised."

When she was gone, Adrian rose and stretched himself wearily.

"I am overtired," he explained. "Why does a man walk who has a horse in the stable? I expected to meet you half-way or nearer, and positively got as far as Skeffington. Then it occurred to me to call at the vicarage, where I had the good luck to find Mrs. Sylvestre out, and the children swinging in the orchard."

"And you stayed to swing them?"

"Pardon me. That would be an effort quite out of my line. They swung one another, and I walked about under the trees with Anna Trevelyan. Tell me, if you don't mind, all about her—in regard to yourself."

"There is very little to tell," said Philip coldly. "I was the friend of her father, and have known her from a child. Mr. Trevelyan was Mrs. Sylvestre's brother."

"But she talks about you as if you had been the good genius of the family, and her own peculiar God Almighty. There is nothing like you in heaven or earth."

Philip colored with vexation. "Why did you encourage her to talk at random? The explanation is, she is ardent and impressionable, and has few friends." Then another thought struck him. "I think you are often at the vicarage, where my visits are almost forbidden, and I am deeply anxious about Anna. It has occurred to me, since I have seen Miss Aylmer, what a help and safeguard her notice and friendship would be. Could it be managed? Would there be difficulty or objection on any side?"

Adrian's face lighted up.

"There would be Mrs. Sylvestre's standing objection to anything that made life pleasanter, but we will try and get over that. It is an excellent idea! Honor will be sure to take kindly to such a singular girl, and I have

a constitutional, inclusive passion for beautiful children, though I see you scarcely reckon Anna Trevelyan under that head. We will brace her with Dorothy, and persuade Mrs. Sylvestre to let them both come to Earlescourt together. Then we will introduce her to Oliver."

"You will introduce no girl to me," said the boy doggedly. "And now, please, both of you go away. I am weary to death of lying here, and want to get back to my couch. Don't wait! I have my stick close beside me. I hate to be helped or watched."

CHAPTER XII.

"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

"With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phoebus fired my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net
And shut me in his golden cage."

—BLAKE.

THE fortnight which Philip Methuen was to spend at Earlescourt lengthened itself to a month. There was not a member of the charming household who did not find some special attraction in the grave, gifted, unselfish young fellow, who, in his turn, felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere so healthy and genial as to be in itself a new sensation.

Sir Walter Earle, himself one of the members for the county and an ardent partisan, discussed politics with him at every convenient opportunity, with a view, as he said, of impressing on the blank paper of his mind the proper ideas and opinions for his future guidance, also undertaking at the same time to direct the channels into which his historical researches should flow.

So strong were the baronet's personal convictions, that he did not stop to doubt whether the principles he enunciated and maintained so vigorously were received with due submission by the pupil whose intelligence was so prompt and whose patience was so invincible.

Philip had been trained to silence and docility; but they erred greatly who supposed that he was prepared to sacrifice any portion, however small, of his individual

judgment and freedom. Religion might have demanded such sacrifices, and from her recognized and austere demands there was nothing he would have wished to hold back; but his path had been diverted, and as regarded society and the world at large, he reserved to himself perfect liberty of thought and action. Only until his knowledge was riper, or the necessity for some decision arose, there was no need to talk about himself.

Adrian in his turn availed himself of his new friend's rare capacity for quiet, sympathetic listening.

"I can tell you my complaint," he said to him, "in very few words. I was either born without the faculty of enjoyment, or I lost it when I grew too old for almond-toffy. There is nothing under the sun I care about. I have no call to work for money or position—they will come in due time without my earning them. I think college honors not worth winning, and politics a bore, besides being more or less a dirty game. I never carry a gun, it is too much fag; and I don't care to see the high-flyers spin and fall. I have had some hot school-boy friendships; but when you have walked over a fellow's mind, that kind of thing grows tame; and I shall always be afraid to marry, lest the same thing should happen with my wife."

Philip colored. "It is a breach of honor to say that when I know who your wife is to be!"

Adrian raised his eyebrows. "Is it? You are too squeamish, though I should be loath to fail in any point of observance to the dearest girl in the world. Heigh-ho! I wish my life had not been cut out for me! I shall be driven to look to Anna Trevelyan for a diversion. Dolly is a dear little bit of soft stuff, with a pretty taste in fairy tales; but a measure of resistance is indispensable."

"But I thought you were a passionate reader?"

"I have been, but am one no longer. I took my youthful fevers so severely that they weakened my system. I was a drivelling idiot over Byron—not his poetry, but the man and his life: his 'cry stormily sweet, his Titan agony,' reached the marrow of my bones. I would have made a pilgrimage—ay, with peas in my shoes—to any person or place where I could have learnt something more about him than I knew—and I knew every line which has ever been written about him. Have you any sympathy with a craze of that kind?"

"I can quite understand it; but have you walked over the length and breadth of Byron's mind?"

"You are mocking, I perceive; but none the less I answer 'Yes' boldly, and will add that of almost every other English poet also, except, of course, Browning, who has still left me some hard nuts to crack. But—on second thoughts we will have no more *buts*—— Let us go and look up Honor—no doubt she is shut in with Oliver—and persuade her to go with us to Skeffington and make friends with Mrs. Sylvestre."

Philip made no objection, and they found her, as Adrian expected, playing her usual part in the boy's room. She held a book in her hand, from which she had been reading aloud. Oliver protested angrily against his brother's interruption.

"She is reading 'Sohrab and Rustum,'" he cried, "and we have just got to the fight, and must go on. Adrian, I hate you! Who cares for that trumpery girl, Anna Trevelyan? and I don't want Honor to go away half the day. We are going to make a picture out of the story!"

Honor laughed and blushed. "I wish you would not betray all our little secrets, Oliver. Mr. Methuen will think me more presumptuous than ever."

Philip had taken up the open book she had put down, and his attention was so fixed upon the page that he did not hear her.

Oliver looked at him with a pleased smile on his eager face.

"You like it! you like it!" he cried, in his shrill tones; "I see you do. Very well; let Adrian and Honor go, and you shall read to me."

He spoke like some Eastern despot appointing his grand vizier.

"Who wrote 'Sohrab and Rustum,' Miss Aylmer?" asked Philip. "I know you read Homer—this is Homeric!"

He read a few lines aloud. The fire of an intense enthusiasm lighted up his face as he spoke. The girl with her keen artist's perceptions thrilled a little.

"It is fine," said Adrian, simply, as if his words set the seal; "I don't think even Tennyson at his best has gone beyond the power and pathos of the death-scene."

Philip was still reading. He carried the book to the window, and stood absorbed for a little time. As he put it down, he said:

"Tennyson, did you say? No doubt you know Tennyson much better than I, but at least no page of his which tells a story has come under my eyes comparable to this. This is large, heroic, simple, like Nature or Fate. Tennyson elaborates with the craft of a *virtuoso*. Let me take your place, Miss Aylmer, after luncheon. It will be a pleasure to me to read this all through and over again, and it is perfect weather for a long walk. You look pale."

"Oliver is a selfish little brute," said Adrian, languidly, "and must learn to do with less of Honor. It is an infamy! I declare you are looking quite fagged. Walking is out of the question—we will ride together."

"You and I?" asked Honor. "Oliver is not selfish—he won't mind being left alone for an hour or two, and Mr. Methuen at least should get the benefit of the weather he thinks so perfect. I know he and Sir Walter were shut up for hours in the library this morning."

"My father never knows how time passes when he is riding his political hobby, but I guess that Methuen does. We want you to call on Mrs. Sylvestre, Honor, and make a conquest of her good-will. Both Philip and I think to know you would do Anna Trevelyan a world of good, so we are to persuade her aunt to let her come and see us, and bring sweet little Dolly in her train. You will be quite willing?"

"I shall be quite willing; but one word from Mr. Methuen himself would surely go further than all you or I could say—wouldn't it?"

She looked a little wistfully at Philip, who had taken up his book again.

"On the contrary, my interference would lead to a summary refusal. Mrs. Sylvestre is a selfish, worldly woman, who will be quick to see the advantages of her daughter and niece being on visiting terms at Earlescourt. I see them too, so clearly, on other grounds, that I am bold enough, as poor Anna's friend, to beg you to make her the offer of your friendship. I can think of nothing so likely to help her as to know you, Miss Aylmer."

He spoke so simply that Honor took herself to task because she felt her cheek flush and heart beat; but she inwardly resolved that no powers of persuasion with which she might be gifted should lie dormant that afternoon.

Afternoon visitors were not numerous at Skeffington Vicarage, so that Mrs. Sylvestre felt a little disconcerted when Janet brought her Honor's card. Although the rack would not have forced the admission from her lips, she was profoundly flattered by the attention.

Adrian Earle counted for nothing when he came in his meaningless way to see Dolly, bringing her books which she would have been better without reading, or presents much too costly for a little girl. But a visit from Miss Aylmer, a young lady of fortune in her own right, and the future mistress of Earlescourt also, whose name was as a sweet odor through the whole district—this did count. Her notice would be worth having for her girls.

It was not often that Mrs. Sylvestre, scrupulously neat in her person, kept a guest waiting; but on the day in question, in keeping with the usual contrariety of things, she was still wearing her morning gown, having planned to pick strawberries for preserving, in the cool of the evening, with her children and governess; and consequently Adrian and Honor had not only full time to exhaust the poor resources of the colorless room, but to grow a little impatient before she entered.

Adrian was astonished and amused at Mrs. Sylvestre's pleasant accost. He would have said it was not in her power to be so gracious; but when he glanced at Honor's sweet face and noble, winning air, he allowed that it was simply impossible for any one to resist her.

Honor was explaining that, ever since Adrian had made Dolly's acquaintance, she had been anxious to know her too, thinking if Oliver could be induced to make friends with her, it would do him so much good.

"There is nothing we all deplore more," she said, "than his nervous dread of strangers, and the influence of a sweet little girl like Dolly might be of inestimable advantage. Will you be good enough to let us try?"

"Dolly is very shy," was the answer, "and would be more afraid of Mr. Oliver than he of her."

At this moment the door was abruptly opened, and Anna entered, holding a book in her hand.

"I know it!" she said sullenly. "Miss Sewell said I was to bring it to you."

She advanced scarcely within the threshold of the door, and spoke without lifting her eyes, so that a moment or two elapsed before she discovered that Mrs. Sylvestre was not alone.

Whatever irritation that lady felt at so ill-timed an

interruption, she restrained the manifestation of the feeling, conscious that she could not do otherwise in face of Adrian's courteous recognition (which he took care should not be too friendly) and Miss Aylmer's kind desire to be made known to the stranger. Almost before she was aware to what she was committing herself, she had yielded to Honor's gentle pressure, and had consented that Anna should bear Dolly company for a few days' visit at Earlescourt. She was probably the less reluctant because Anna's indifference was obvious; her notice of Adrian and his companion was of the slightest—her whole air and manner showing what her aunt characterized as "insufferable effrontery."

She was summarily dismissed to summon the more gentle Dolly, with the intimation that she herself need not return.

"My niece, Miss Aylmer, has been a source of profound anxiety ever since I undertook the charge of her, but she is more unmanageable than ever since I found it my duty to put a stop to her intercourse with young Mr. Methuen."

Although anticipating the nature of the answer, Honor asked simply: "Was it really a duty?"

"To preserve her from becoming a pervert to Romanism? My dear Miss Aylmer, we are absolutely responsible for the souls we have in our keeping; and consider also my position in the parish! If a young person under the vicar's guardianship turned Papist, it would be an indelible disgrace to the family."

"But had you reason to think Mr. Methuen would have used his influence in that way?"

Mrs. Sylvestre smiled significantly. "He could not help himself! Did a Jesuit priest ever forego the chance of making a pervert, or of denying the intention of so doing, when it suited his purpose?"

Adrian could scarcely contain his patience, even under the eager touch of Honor's restraining hand, who welcomed the entrance of Dolly as a fortunate diversion. To the young man's affectionate inquiry if she would not like to come and see him at home, Dolly answered, with a deep blush and an anxious reference to her mother's face, that "there was nothing in the world she would like so much."

So with this auspicious issue of her embassy, Honor rose, saying that she herself would drive over to fetch the children to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

"What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day. . . .
God did anoint thee with His odorous oil
To wrestle, not to reign."

—E. B. BROWNING.

THERE are certain crises in our lives when we pause and find ourselves astray—off the track we had striven to keep—face to face with the things we have feared and hated—cut away from the hopes and possible chances which would have made us good men or happy women. And then we look round eagerly for the fetish on which to vent our despair. We will not arraign Providence, for we have relinquished that belief, nor Fate, for it is pagan; but we pour forth the acid of our self-contempt on the short-sightedness of human prescience, the weakness which is mastered by the relentless force of circumstance.

"Had we but known!" is a wail eloquent with human defeat.

As Honor Aylmer's charming little pony phaeton bowled down the avenue of overarching beeches on its homeward way to cheery Earlescourt, in the riotous glamour of the August sunshine, her own generous heart all aglow with interest and sympathy for the pale, large-eyed, silent girl who sat beside her, how little she guessed that she was weaving with her own hands the warp and woof of her untoward destiny, and introducing into the harmony of her life the note of discord that was to jangle all its sweetness.

As they drew up before the fine facade of the house, Honor saw with what grave scrutiny Anna appeared to take note of it, and at the same moment Adrian ran down the stately flight of steps which led to the entrance-hall, to assist them out of the carriage.

"My sweet little Dolly, you look like Titania herself in that white frock. Welcome to Earlescourt! We are going to have a good time together. Miss Trevelyan, I see you are taking the measure of my ancestral home. Does it please you almost as well as Methuen Place?"

"It is bigger," said Anna coldly. She looked eagerly

about her with a wistful expression in her eyes, almost piteous in its intensity. Adrian felt a movement of annoyance.

"Shall I show you the gardens before we go into the house? Do you think, Honor, we may make a raid on the peaches? I want the children to have sweet recollections of Earlescourt."

He met Anna's direct level glance, touched with an expression of careless scorn. She walked past him and entered the house with Honor, while Adrian, bound by his promise, led Dorothy off in the direction of the hot-houses.

As the two girls crossed the hall, Honor, moved by a sudden impulse, stood still for a moment and kissed Anna.

"I want you to be very happy here," she said; "to forget the troubles you have at home, or, better still, to tell me all about them. I want you to be fond of me, Anna. I have no very dear girl friend."

"Don't!" cried Anna, in a sharp voice of pain. "I can bear anything better than kindness—it kills me!"

She threw up her head with a defiant movement, trying to conquer the sobs that rose in her throat, and Honor thought she had never seen misery more intense than gleamed in the dark depths of her eyes.

"I am not good," the girl went on. "It is no pleasure to me to see other people happy; they always seem to me to have stolen my share. A place like this, full of all that heart can wish—beautiful things, kind people who love one another—makes me feel dreadfully how empty and cruel the world is for me. Why am I so poor and you so rich? Why was the little I wanted taken away, and you have got everything—*everything*? What good will a few days' rest do me, when I must go back into slavery? Do you understand?"

"I think I do," said Honor gravely; "but we must talk all this over another time, and it shall not be our fault if Earlescourt in the future shall not be able to brighten Skeffington. Come, I will take you upstairs to your room myself, and we will have some tea together. We do not dine till eight."

"Will Philip Methuen be here by that time?"

Honor colored. "I did not know you knew he was here, and am not quite sure it is right for you to meet under Mrs. Sylvestre's objections."

"I always know where he is," was Anna's answer; "and if I had not found him here, I should have gone to his own house to see him." Then after a pause, she added, leaning back against the balusters and looking intently at Honor: "It is of no use for any one to try to separate me from Philip Methuen. He is my one friend till I die, or he. He made me what I am—I mean, I should even be worse than I am had it not been for him. When he first came to see us, seven years ago, I could neither read nor write. He taught me from the first miserable beginnings, and persuaded my father to go on teaching me when he went away. My father always seemed to think it did not matter how ignorant a woman was. I did not mind a bit either, but no child ever worked harder in its blundering way than I: and Philip said I had great talents and got on wonderfully fast. I have not great talents," said the girl solemnly; "he is mistaken there, but I would have cut off my right hand to please him."

She moved forward as she said the last words, and followed Honor into the room.

"It seems strange all this is for me," she went on, looking round upon its dainty elegance with discriminating eyes; "but it is not such things that I crave after—not pretty clothes even," glancing at Honor.

She sat down in a low chair and leaned her head on her hand.

"But, my sweet Anna," cried Honor, kneeling down beside her, "be reasonable! Even were your aunt different, even did you live here, you could not be always with your friend Philip. It is hard upon women that such friendships never seem practicable for them. Besides, he is not going to stop here in the country with womenkind and the growing crops—he is to be a great man in the great world of London."

"But I shall see him to-night?"

"Yes; we expect him back in time for dinner. He is spending the day with his uncle, and after dinner, if you like, no one shall speak to him but you."

It was almost the first experience Anna had had of the amenities of social life. The routine, completeness, and ease of the domestic arrangements struck her as unexampled luxury; and the ordinary appointments of the rooms and service produced the effect upon her mind of an Arabian Night's entertainment.

Philip only came into the drawing-room just as the gong sounded for dinner; and as the good-natured Sir Walter had already taken the beautiful young stranger upon his arm, she was obliged to content herself with a word and a smile.

Her host placed her by his side at dinner; but Anna took no part in the talk that went on around her, and which was indeed almost a strange language to her. The easy flow of speech, the bright remark and prompt rejoinder, the pleasant give-and-take of familiar social intercourse, were all unknown conditions to her. She smiled scornfully when she observed how merrily little Dolly was chatting with her gracious patron, Adrian Earle. When he turned his attention to her, Anna had nothing to say to him, piquing his interest by her genuine indifference to his attractions, and perhaps also by the undisguised interest with which she seemed to hang on Methuen's most casual remarks. She ate little, and spoke less, contenting herself with gazing at each speaker by turn, with the steadfast mournful look which gave such a tragic air to her face.

When the girls were come into the drawing-room, Honor felt a certain relief on finding that Anna was able to interest herself in a superb volume of photographs, illustrative of Roman and Florentine art and antiquities. She even invited Dorothy to look over them with her, promptly identifying everything that had come under her own observation, and making an occasional remark, which showed there had at least been careful culture in this direction.

"Oh, I have been in and out of these galleries from a child with my dear father," she said, in answer to Honor. "He used to say they were the only nursery I had ever had. I could always draw," she added, with a smile, "though I found it hard work to learn to write."

She turned to the illustrations of *Or San Michele*, and found the St. George of Donatello.

"My father always said that Philip Methuen might have served for that model. I have drawn Philip's portrait scores and scores of times, but he is changed."

"For the better?" asked Honor, smiling.

Anna shook her head decisively, and at the same moment Philip himself came in.

"I have got leave of absence early this evening, Miss Aylmer. I hope I am not come too soon, but I wanted a

long talk with Anna. No, please, don't think it necessary to go away—I want you to help me.”

Whenever Philip looked at Honor Aylmer there was always an indefinable change in his expression—an added gentleness—a shade of instinctive reverence of which he was himself profoundly unconscious. Also, his eyes always lingered on her face a moment longer than necessity required: it was to him so exquisitely sweet a face, and he was anxious to observe if there were signs of weariness or depression in it. He knew how exacting were Oliver's demands, and how constant was her response to them.

“I must go home to-morrow,” he went on to explain, still addressing Honor. “Lord Sainsbury is to arrive on a two-days' visit, and you know I am his servant at command. He has, it appears, some important communication to make, and Sir Giles is ill at ease. He fears some flaw in the indentures——”

“Which would be rather matter for rejoicing with you?”

“No; I did not mean to imply that. My interests are now identical with my uncle's.”

He paused. There was a look in the girl's eyes which plainly said that if he cared to go on and speak of the profound disappointment of his life, her interest and sympathy were waiting on his words. It is not true he felt no inclination to yield to the temptation, but at least it was conquered as soon as admitted.

“No,” he repeated more firmly; “I have entirely accepted Sir Giles' views. My chief anxiety is lest I should disappoint him; but the disappointment shall not come from any lack of effort on my part.”

Then he became aware that Anna Trevelyan was watching him with a look of angry impatience: all this was outside her stringent claims on his time and notice. With a slight inward feeling of annoyance, he drew a chair to her side and sat down.

“Dolly and I,” said Honor, rising, “are going to venture to bid Oliver good-night,” and she led the child out of the room with her, and the two strangely assorted friends were alone together.

Philip turned and looked at Anna's lowering face with a quickening sense of displeasure; then to qualify it came the prompt thought of her miserable upbringing and forlorn condition, and he put his hand upon her bowed head with a caressing touch and smile.

"Come, Anna," he said, "this is one of the golden opportunities of life! I should have come to see you at the vicarage; but this is far better. When I am hard at work in London, I shall comfort myself with thinking that you have a powerful friend in Miss Aylmer, and that Earlescourt will make even Skeffington endurable."

She was silent, having shaken off his touch by a quick movement, and now sat with head erect and scornful eyes averted.

"What is wrong?" he asked, coldly. "Do you not appreciate the good fortune which has fallen to your share?"

"How can I answer you?" she broke out, passionately, as if the words forced themselves against her will. "I don't know how to express what I feel, but you are not the Philip Methuen of old times. You are cold as a stone. You are careless of my feelings, of my rights, of your own promises even. What did you tell me that dreadful day in Florence? That you would be my friend as long as I lived—that you loved me dearly! Do you think that young lady who has just gone away has any reason to believe that you love me dearly?"

Philip felt equally perplexed and distressed. He had a deep-rooted intention of fulfilling his pledges of friendship to poor Lewis Trevelyan's child; but he began to doubt whether, under the influence of excited sympathy, he had not expressed himself too strongly in the past, to which she clung so tenaciously. He had not meant more than that he loved her as he loved everything that appealed to his compassion and exercised his impulse to heal and bless. Also, words which well befitted his lips as priest on the verge of consecration bore a different significance under his changed conditions. He recalled with uneasiness Adrian's careless comments on their relations. Anyway, he was fully conscious that there was no response in his heart to the ardent challenge of her looks and reproaches.

"Tell me," he said, "what you expected or wished me to do, and where my affection has failed. I never cease to think about you with the solicitude a brother feels for a dear sister."

As she remained obstinately silent, he went on again.

"There is a good deal of resemblance in our situations, Anna. Suppose we look at them from the same point of view. We have both been torn up from our roots and

transplanted to this far-away corner of England. Life comes to us with a new face, and demands a new line of duty. There will be no peace for either of us, unless we consent to submit to this and make the best of it. I have made up my mind to do the day's work forced upon me without a glance before or behind. Can't you do the same? You profess to love me; what we really love, we obey and imitate. I shall look for acts, not words."

"There is a difference," she said, doggedly; "and you are either cheating yourself, or trying to cheat me, when you talk like that. All your changes are for the better, and you know and feel that they are; all mine are for the worse."

Philip turned a little pale, as his habit was when moved.

"That is an insult, little Anna," he said, "though your mind is not fine enough to perceive it. Let that pass, for I only want to talk to you about yourself. I do not agree that your old life was better than your present life; but even if it had been, you could not have gone on living it. You will outgrow your regrets for the fond, ignorant old nurse and the wild life at the Fiesole farm—even for the dear father who can never come back. New interests, new hopes and larger thoughts will come to you if you will open your mind to receive them. I know your aunt is austere; but there are your cousins, and uncle, and your good governess to love, and in the future Miss Aylmer will be your friend."

"And suppose I do not want Honor Aylmer for a friend, and, much as I hate Skeffington Vicarage, I should prefer to stay there forever rather than come again to fine, beautiful Earlescourt?" Her voice shook with passion.

"In that case," he answered, coldly, "I should think you both blind and thankless, and that I have been mistaken in believing that you had a generous heart at bottom."

"At bottom!" she cried. "What do you mean? At the bottom of what was my generous heart to be found?"

Philip looked steadily into the girl's pale, defiant face. Her eyes scintillated with anger, her delicate nostrils quivered and dilated.

"It will be better for you to hear the truth. At the bottom of that selfish perverseness which has cost your

father many hours of bitter anxiety, and makes me almost despair of you at times."

Anna recoiled as if she had been struck.

"Mother of God," she ejaculated, "hear him! You are cruel; you have given me a blow. I hate you, Philip!"

She was beside herself with rage and pain; the more so, perhaps, that he made no sign, but remained quite still and unmoved. Then suddenly seizing his hand, which was hanging close to her touch, she bowed her mouth upon it, and set her small square teeth in the flesh. The next moment the paroxysm of fury was spent, and she sank to the floor at his feet, a miserable heap of penitence and shame.

Philip caught her up from the ground with a feeling of intolerable pain; but it needed all his strength to prevent her falling again into the same posture of self-abasement. He was forced to seat her beside him, and to pass his strong arm round her palpitating body. Her head drooped so low on her breast that her face was concealed by the falling masses of her hair; but he felt the heaving of her sobs and the hot rain of her tears on the hands which supported her. Words failed her; but no words could have given expression to her humiliation.

"Anna," he said, gently, "forgive yourself! I think nothing of it. It is only one proof more that you are still a child. It is an old trick not quite cured; and you were right—I was cruel!"

He passed his hand caressingly over her head as he spoke. He saw she could not speak; but he went on, trying to weld the iron while it was hot.

"I was cruel," he repeated, "and perhaps I was unjust. Prove it to me, Anna; make me proud of my friend and sister in the future!"

"You are still cruel," she murmured; "your kindness kills me. Give me something hard to do!"

She had ventured to look up—he met her eyes with a slight smile.

"I will," he answered; "but you must not think I speak to vex you. What am I to say to a girl who tells me, as you did when we last met, that God, religion, and duty are words which have no meaning to her mind? Poor child, I can scarcely blame you, and I will help you if I can. Take some human example of goodness, and try and live up to it—it will lead you one step nearer the divine. Do you follow me, Anna? A sweeter, less

selfish woman than Honor Aylmer never drew the breath of life. If you want to be loved—to be something better than happy—use your utmost best to grow like her.”

Undoubtedly Philip Methuen’s zeal was greater than his discretion; every word that he spoke was a fresh provocation to the girl who was listening to him. She actually shivered with the intensity of her repudiation; humiliation and shame were forgotten. She looked up keenly into his face, and said:

“It is a good thing you did not become a priest—you will be able to marry this sweet young lady.”

He started a little, and the color rushed into his face. The insolent words cut deep. Although he did not know it, his whole soul was steeped in reverent tenderness for the girl whose gracious nature he had been studying through the long days of familiar intercourse the last month had afforded. But the suggestion thus coarsely thrust upon him seemed at once a treason and an outrage. A new feeling of repulsion from the speaker vaguely stirred in his breast, and he involuntarily moved farther away.

“You speak like a child,” he said, “of things you do not understand; but it will be better for you to know that Miss Aylmer is to marry Mr. Earle.”

He would have added something more, but to his unexpected relief an interruption was made by the entrance of Sir Walter and Adrian from the dining-room. The first inquiry of the former was for Honor; the latter sat down by Anna’s side, and looked curiously into her face.

“Excuse me,” he said, “I am naturally impertinent, but I think you and Methuen have been quarrelling.”

“You are right,” she answered, promptly, “but it has been all my fault.”

Her eyes, still red with her bitter tears, sparkled; her lips parted with an enchanting smile; her beauty seemed suddenly to have thrown off its veil. The words Philip had just spoken permeated her blood like wine; hope, undefined indeed, but pliant and vigorous, was born in her soul. It was no childish ardor that touched the expression of her face as she looked toward Philip. With no hindrance between them, what should prevent the realization of the dream of her life?—to live under the same roof; to begin and end the day together; to clasp hands and kiss each other at meeting and parting; to

read out of the same book, and eat at the same table; to walk side by side through life, none daring to divide them. This was what she wanted, but could scarcely tell him that it was, and all that fell short of it was misery and despair.

"Adrian, fetch Honor out of Oliver's room," interrupted Sir Walter; "there is a great deal too much of this indulgence. You make the boy worse than he would be."

"Let me go," said Philip, with a certain eagerness very unusual to him. "It is the hours before bed-time he feels to hang heaviest," and he had left the room before Sir Walter's impatient objections had reached his ears.

He paused for a moment at the foot of the staircase, and raised his clasped hands to his head. He was twenty-four years old, and this was the first moment that any touch of the perturbation of passion had stirred the depths of his soul. He stood there for several minutes quite motionless outwardly, but conscious of the flow and movement of inward forces, latent until the words of Anna had quickened the life within them. Scarcely out of his cloister, and love had come to him already! To him, whose existence almost from infancy had been a protracted act of consecration, and who had been prepared to accept the denials and abstentions of the priesthood, with the superb confidence and humility of those who know their strength to be God-derived and therefore invincible. His feeling, in that moment of intense self-concentration, was that he had fallen from the cool, serene heights where the human soul communes with the heavens above, into the unwholesome and heated vortex of worldly strife and passion. It was as if a knife had been laid to the very roots of his honor and pride and cut them down at a blow.

Further, for whom had he thus fallen? For a girl whom he knew to be the pledged wife of another man before his eyes had even seen her. But was this feeling that possessed him love? Love was said to be urgent, aggressive, imperious; pressing down every obstacle between itself and the possession of the thing beloved; ready to barter and forego on the right hand and on the left, if only the supreme object were attained.

But he, he thought, could go through life unsatisfied yet content, so long as the sweet serenity of Honor's life

was untroubled. The strongest wish of his soul was, not to be happy, but to see her happy, so that the joy and tender radiance of her natural temper might be undimmed by disappointment or any spiritual turmoil. And this was to be accomplished, not by him—ah, God, no!—but by sweet-tempered, affectionate Adrian Earle, who had been the first to hold out the hand of friendship to himself. So let it be!

Then came another turn of thought. Standing there in the cool stillness of the moonlit hall, with the delicious rustle of leaves softly stealing through the wide-open doors, and the divine calm of a summer night brooding over the lovely outside world, it followed, almost of necessity, that reason and duty should make themselves heard. Also, there was the acute sense of spiritual outrage to help him now. But in the future? Chance would throw them often together; she would approach him with the same winning friendliness she had shown him all along. He seemed to see the eager, outstretched hand, the arch smile on the lovely lips, and the tender light in her eyes waiting to meet the answering glance in his. She would question him about his doings, quick to comprehend every point of his position, quicker still to sympathize with difficulties and regrets that no one seemed able to understand or suspect but herself, and yet he had told her nothing! Adrian, too, would talk to him incessantly about her, insisting on her sweetness and her charms—consulting him about their united plans, asking advice here, proposing alternative arrangements there—discussing their approaching marriage, where they should travel, where live, what gifts he should offer.

Should he be equal to the task which in this hour of clear insight he had implicitly accepted, and never permit his secret to escape his rigid control? Worse: would there be no moments of perilous weakness in which he should cease to care to do so—when courage and honor failed under the divine smile of the sweet blue eyes, and his soul rushed to his lips?

He heard Oliver's door open and shut, and the rustle of a woman's gown. She was coming downstairs and a meeting was unavoidable. He changed his posture, rallied his self-command, and waited for her at the foot of the staircase.

"I have been sent to call you," he said. "Sir Walter

wants some songs, and I have lingered shamefully on my errand. I have stood here thinking the hall enchanted, and regretting that I am going away to-morrow."

"To-morrow! I suppose you must go away to-morrow. But what will Oliver do without you? You have spoilt him for all of us."

"I am going to him now to bid him good-by, for I shall be gone before he is up to-morrow. I am glad he has made friends with me."

Honor looked at him with the words she was going to say unspoken on her lips. A ray of moonlight fell direct upon him, and, though it may seem a rash statement to make of a young Englishman in evening dress, she thought Anna Trevelyan was every way right in comparing him with the St. George of Donatello.

It was not so much the beauty of the face, nor the strength and grace of the figure, but a certain noble, self-controlled dignity which seemed to suggest the idea of the youthful Christian warrior. A line from Spenser flashed across her memory:

"Right faithful, true he was, in deed and word:
But of his cheere did seem too solemn sad."

"If it is really your last evening," she said—"and I am glad to see you seem to regret it—let us go back to Oliver's room together for an hour. Anna has told me that you are a great musician, which you have kept a profound secret, and Oliver, that you have sung to him when you and he were alone. I will not repeat what they say about it, for it would vex you; but I ask if you have dealt kindly with your friend, knowing my passion for music? Let me hear you before you go away!"

"I think I would rather not, though I would do much to give you pleasure. I am not at all at home in drawing-room music. What I sang to Oliver were echoes of the churches—chants, and hymns, and spiritual songs. I should have to unmake myself before I could sing to please a fashionable audience."

"I will not urge the point," she answered; "I see I am not judged worthy. But Lord Sainsbury is a fanatic in music; he will discover your gifts, and overcome your scruples. My aunt, whom I am sorry to say you do not yet know, is sometimes at his town house; she and his sister are great friends. You see what delightful chances of meeting there will be for all of us in the future! Besides, there is a long stretch of time between this and

February, and Methuen Place always spends Christmas at Earlescourt."

She smiled, and was going to pass him on her way to the drawing-room, when he interrupted her intention.

"If you will allow me, Miss Aylmer, I will bid you good-by now, for I have half promised my uncle to be with him by breakfast-time, and shall start too early to see you again. I thought yesterday I had been careless of his comfort in staying here so long, but the charm of this house was so new to me, I fell into the snare. You have all shown me a kindness I can never repay."

She held out her hand at once with no shadow upon the brightness of her face.

"I am glad we are your first friends, and have won you," she said; "for when you go into the great world you will soon have so many, we should have stood no chance."

She looked back and waved her hand as she entered the stream of light from the open door of the drawing-room, seeing that he still stood watching her, and then she shut the warmth and sparkle in with her, and Philip went slowly upstairs to Oliver's room.

CHAPTER XIV.

"This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses."

—*Macbeth*.

It was eight o'clock in the evening of the next day, and the three great windows of the dining-room at Methuen Place stood wide open to the terrace and lawns, and the splash and tinkle of the fountain, the waters of which gleamed crimson and gold in the intense sunset glow.

A small oval table was laid for dinner for three, with exquisite precision—the finest of damask, the choicest of the seldom-used treasures of plate, had been produced and furbished for the occasion of Lord Sainsbury's visit, which was one of exceeding anxiety to the old servants of the family. The *menu* of that evening's repast had been studied and elaborated for days in the spacious sunlit kitchen of the house, for it was felt that the social credit of the establishment was at stake. Every flaw

and omission would be promptly detected by the great man accustomed to feast at kings' tables, and would be scored to their own master's disadvantage.

The guest at this hour was already arrived, fetched from the station in the old brougham by the superannuated grays, which had been so contemptuously reported upon to Philip on the first day of his arrival at Trichester, and which occasioned great searchings of heart to the old coachman himself, who had known them through every stage of their existence. Even Sir Giles had shaken his head dubiously as he saw them brought round to the front, with as much dash and effect as their advanced age admitted.

"Undoubtedly Sainsbury will think it a sorry turn-out! A smart pair from the 'Antelope' would have been better, but it is too late now. Bennett will do his best to rouse them on the way in, but don't make any excuses, Philip."

Philip was going to the station to meet their guest.

"It would never have occurred to me to do so. So long as we give him of our best, a guest is well served; but my impression is that Lord Sainsbury is less exacting than you imagine."

Assuredly had the chariot of the sun been awaiting him, the great man could not have appeared more perfectly satisfied. He had nothing with him but a small portmanteau, which Philip himself took from him as he pulled it from under the seat of the railway carriage. A whisper had got abroad among the little crowd at the railway station who Sir Giles Methuen's guest was, and his tall, spare figure and marked countenance were recognized by a few among them, and swift as light the information flew. Some hats were lifted, a faint cheer raised, and while these marks of recognition were graciously acknowledged by their object, Philip observed the flush of annoyance that came over the pale, weary-looking face.

"This way," he whispered; "if we go through the station we shall be close upon the carriage;" and in a few moments more Lord Sainsbury was leaning back against the well-padded though moth-eaten cushions with a look of intense relief upon his face.

"What a country, Methuen, for a fox-hunter!" he said, looking out upon the glorious expanse of downs which swelled to the horizon on either hand, as soon as they

were well clear of the precincts of the town. "Do you appreciate your privileges, or has your foreign training smothered the national instincts?"

"In a very great measure, I fear. I can ride, but not to hounds. I have not a spark of enthusiasm in that direction; but I hope a taste for fox-hunting is not considered by Lord Sainsbury a necessary part of a young man's equipment?"

"I have always thought myself," returned the other, stretching himself more at his ease, "that the life of a country squire is the most enviable under the sun, granting that one had no ambition beyond it."

Philip smiled.

"Ah! I see you are already putting me down as a speaker of platitudes; but in official life we are all speakers of platitudes. There is no more useful accomplishment for a man to possess than the being able to utter some axiom with an air of engaging originality." Then, suddenly changing his tone, he asked abruptly, "You are still in the same mind in my behalf, Mr. Methuen?"

"Yes."

"I warned you at the embassy—in jest it may have appeared to you, but it was done in all sincerity—that I was a man hard to please and difficult to live with, and I wish to repeat the warning. If a political career be your object, I can help you materially, no doubt, and I am disposed to do so; but you will have to buy the benefit dear. I never spare myself nor my subordinates. I expect people who work under my orders to be able to coerce the flesh to the spirit, and I am completely intolerant of sickness, feebleness, and fatigue. Simply, the matter in hand must be got through in due course—I accept no excuses."

"It is difficult to pledge one's self absolutely to unlimited requirements, but all the strength of body and mind I possess I am prepared to place at your service."

"Not, I hope, with any expectation of ready and affectionate recognition. I never praise any man, and I thank very few. I am given to understand that you are a devout Catholic."

"So much so that, were not your faith the same, I should not now have the honor of listening to Lord Sainsbury's conditions of service."

Lord Sainsbury looked at him keenly, and Philip met the protracted gaze modestly, it is true, as became his

age and position, but with perfect firmness. A slight smile touched his companion's thin lips.

"On that point we shall probably not quarrel," he answered; "but it strikes me you have preserved an unusual faculty of independence after some twelve years' training in the Abbé Olier's seminaries. That is a matter of no consequence to me, except under chances of mental collision. Should such chances occur, it goes without saying that my will is absolute."

Philip made no reply.

"You reserve the point, Mr. Methuen?" asked Lord Sainsbury, sharply.

"Only under circumstances which are never likely to occur—a question of duty to a higher authority than yours."

"I think," was the answer, "you may rest satisfied on that point. My notions of duty to queen, church, or country, to my own honor or the honor of another man, are possibly on as high a level as Mr. Philip Methuen's. I can even conceive of the possibility of difference of opinion between us, when the supreme right might not lie with him!"

The tone was trenchant, and there was a flash in the steel-blue eyes which gave a full illustration of his own recent warning. It was perhaps the influence of his severe training to obedience, or the natural generosity of his temper, that the only feeling excited in Philip's mind by this spurt of indignation was one of compunction and regret.

"I beg your pardon," he said, simply; "I see I have been guilty of an impertinence without intending it. I meant no more than that there are occasions when no man can judge what he ought to do but himself."

The apology was coldly received, and for the rest of the way conversation flagged; but as the carriage turned in at the park gates, Lord Sainsbury uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"What a pleasaunce!" he exclaimed. "Here, in fact, stand Tennyson's 'immemorial elms.' We Sainsburys—mere mushroom-growths of the present century—have nothing to show like this. On the strength of Methuen Park, Philip, I am disposed to forgive you—you may well hold your head higher than I."

He repeated these compliments with still greater suavity to Sir Giles himself, who stood waiting to re-

ceive him on the threshold of his door, and won the heart of every member of the household by some word of recognition or gracious expression of delight in his surroundings.

From the ancient Banksia rose-tree which grew close up to his chamber-window to the fine old plate which had been buried under the floor of the stable during the wars of the Parliament (which story Sir Giles was never reluctant to tell), not a point was too insignificant to catch and claim his notice.

By the time the successful dinner was over, and the exquisite home-grown dessert placed on the table, which had been wheeled close to the wide issue of the open window, Sir Giles' slight anxieties were all allayed, and he was conscious of the profound satisfaction of the man whose hospitality to an honored guest has been a quiet but complete success.

Lord Sainsbury leaned back in his chair with an intense enjoyment of the charm of the situation. The moon was at the full, and her unclouded light not only revealed the outline of every flower and tree, subduing each diverse tint to lustrous silver, but paled the flame of the lamps and candles inside the apartment, producing effects of weird picturesqueness.

"It seems strange," he said, "that a man with such a paradise as this in possession and prospect should want to fight his way through the thorny world outside! Were I in your nephew's place, Sir Giles, I should select some Eve to share it with me, and sit down with her under the ancestral fig-tree till summoned to the paradise above!"

"Philip prefers to earn his heavenly reward, and has no taste whatever for the *dolce far niente*; also you forget, my dear lord, that it is only to the weary that rest seems desirable. Still, there is a young man, a near neighbor of ours, Sir Walter Earle's eldest son, who has marked out for himself precisely the programme you describe. He is engaged to be married to the most delightful girl in Dorset."

"Ah!" said Lord Sainsbury, languidly, "my sister knows the family, and is anxious to press me into the train of the young lady's admirers—somehow opportunity failed last season. By the way, do you know Miss Aylmer, Mr. Methuen?" he asked, with sudden abruptness, and facing round full on Philip.

"I have spent the last month at Earlescourt in daily intercourse with her, and I think my uncle might have safely challenged, not Dorset only, but all England to find her equal."

The light was not good enough to observe his face so closely as his interrogator desired, but at least the readiness of reply and quiet, level tone might be supposed calculated to disarm suspicion. Nevertheless, Lord Sainsbury smiled slightly to himself with an increased satisfaction in his own acuteness.

"I think," he said, after a little pause, "that the time is come to explain to you, Sir Giles, why I ventured to offer myself as your guest. I attributed it to the desire to discuss more fully with you the details of your nephew's appointment—and that, in brief, is my motive. The fact is that circumstances have changed so materially since we last met that I preferred to state them in person."

Sir Giles bowed a little stiffly. Had the great man changed his mind?

"Do not for a moment suppose," the other resumed, quick to observe the impression produced, "that I wish to go back from my engagement. I may add that the little I have seen of Mr. Methuen to-day has considerably increased my personal desire for closer relations; but the bargain stood for London. If the venue is changed to Calcutta, I am not so unreasonable as to expect it to hold good."

There was a brief shock of surprise; then Sir Giles exclaimed, with rather forced heartiness, "Is it to be so? I congratulate you with all my heart. The Government, then, have at length discovered——"

"The Government have discovered nothing at all. but have been forced to accept the resignation of another faithful, ill-used public servant, who has worn out health and strength of body, brain and conscience, at the post of highest difficulty and responsibility. He is only waiting for his successor to go out before he comes home to die."

"I withdraw my congratulations. If toughness of constitution and nerve are essential qualifications for the post, your decision is suicidal: you will scarcely obtain the consent of your friends."

"I have not yet consulted them; this communication is confidential, on account of your personal interest in

the matter. Creaking gates hang long; and there are some temperaments seemingly feeble which have a certain faculty of resilience that stands in as good stead as thews and sinews. But the question before us now is not whether I am fit for Governor-General of India, but whether you can part with your nephew."

Sir Giles passed his hand nervously over his eyes.

"There is no need for decision at present," Lord Sainsbury hastened to add. "I simply put the matter before you for consideration, unless Mr. Methuen has already pronounced against the scheme in his own mind."

"I have not done that," said Philip; "but I do not feel free to express any personal inclination. I think I can engage to give you an answer in the morning."

"Precisely; we will dismiss the matter till then."

Lord Sainsbury retired early under plea of fatigue; in reality, he perceived that Sir Giles Methuen was restless and preoccupied, in spite of his courtly, old fashioned efforts to hide the fact—evidently on the tenter-hooks of anxiety to ascertain his nephew's mind on this new departure, or to express his own.

As soon as he was gone, Sir Giles turned sharply upon Philip.

"You have already made up your mind in this matter? It is a formality to consult me?"

There was the accusation of wounded affection in the tone and in the keen flash of the eyes.

"I have made up my mind subject to your approval. It is enough for you to speak the word, and I remain."

"Ah, I thought as much! This is the consecrated youth, without ambition or capacity for diplomacy, who requires divine sanctions and religious aims before he sets out on a career! My memory is good, nephew. Yet you are prepared, I see, to throw over every consideration of gratitude and duty, and embrace the first chance of distinction which comes in your way."

Where is the reason in arguing with the unreasonable? Philip naturally held his tongue.

Sir Giles pushed away his chair and took a turn to the other end of the room.

"Is what I say unworthy of notice? At least you must plead guilty to having possessed a very imperfect notion of your own character?"

"Yes," said Philip, in a low tone, and with a dreary smile on his lips, "I plead guilty to that."

Sir Giles was slightly appeased. He came back to his nephew's side.

"You like this man Sainsbury?"

"I do."

"And the notion of exile from England and me?"

"I like the notion of hard work and routine duty. I accepted Lord Sainsbury's offer, in the first place, at your command, and thought you would agree that it would look like cowardice or breach of faith to break an engagement because the conditions were a little changed. I was influenced by the knowledge I had of your own chivalrous sense of honor."

"Also by the complete ignoring of any regret I might feel in parting with the nephew pledged to fulfil the part of a son?"

"I frankly own I did not much consider that. You have known me so short a time—just three months—I could scarcely suppose such a feeling would be stronger than the decided wishes you have expressed about my future. But, I repeat, it only remains for you to command me to throw up Lord Sainsbury's offer. Can I say more?"

Sir Giles took another turn in the room.

"And how long, Nephew Philip," he asked, dryly, "do you require before you commit yourself to the weakness of affectionate regard? Three months have been long enough for me to discover that I liked you; what period of time, I repeat, would it take to reconcile you to my shortcomings and peculiarities?"

"Enough!" said Philip, getting up, "the matter is decided. I stay here! I am a bad hand at protestations; but I will give you the most convincing proof that I love you. On second thoughts, three months seem to me long enough to form attachments which will last as long as life lasts."

He went up to the place where Sir Giles was standing with his back against the ponderous oak sideboard, and his gray eyes alight with irritation and sensibility combined, and taking the old man's hand, kissed it with the charming foreign action which sat so naturally upon him.

"Understand me! I will never leave you without your own consent. I will find some home work to do."

Sir Giles looked at him intently for a moment.

"Good!" he answered. "So let it stand! And now to bed. God bless you, Philip!"

The next morning was spent by Sir Giles and his guest in a visit of inspection to the home farm, Lord Sainsbury saying that he wished to absorb as many rural sights and sounds and fragrant breaths of cattle as the forty-eight hours would allow.

Philip was not invited to join them, nor indeed had he much inclination.

He had spent a great part of the night in thinking again over his position, which he stigmatized as one of shameful dereliction—in love with another man's plighted wife!

That was the way he chose to consider it, pouring condemnation and contempt on his own weakness.

Of course it was a weakness that should be conquered at any cost—torn up by the roots, cast into the oven and consumed. But the process that might have been possible with half the world between them, and time and brain taxed by hard and unfamiliar work on foreign ground, would be not impossible, but terribly severe in the constant contact of society, and the far more trying intercourse of close domestic friendship.

He had said this to himself before, when the first shock of discovery had startled him; but he seemed to feel it the more keenly because the chance of escape had been offered him, and he was constrained to reject it. Besides, one may resolve to conquer in this sort of conflict, and discover in the end that the victory is outside human nature. He could not fail to consider that the tender, reverential passion which he felt for Honor Aylmer was based on much stronger foundations than the love which is born of the exquisite curves of a woman's form, of the soft languors of rose-red yielding lips, and of drooping, love-lighted eyes.

If he loved her because of her sweet intelligence and goodness, how could he cease to love her so long as these qualities endured? It seemed to him as if some superhuman hand had touched the sealed fountains of his manhood, and bidden the living waters flow to vivify and strengthen every faculty he possessed. This love, which must be stifled, was, after all, a form of worship—a phase of his ingrained religiousness; for what he adored was the beauty of self-sacrifice—the supreme virtue without which neither man nor woman would have pleased him. It was the total absence of this faculty in Anna Trevelyan which was changing his early

tenderness into a sentiment almost approaching repulsion.

Well, there would have been no danger to others, and perhaps only a salutary pain for himself, if he had cherished this holy passion in the silent depths of his heart, and delivered up utterly all the rest of himself to Lord Sainsbury's demands. Sitting immersed in official business under his chief's strenuous influence, in the far-away palace on the Hooghly, with the monotonous beat of the punka overhead and a heathen city around him, he would have had short time for the indulgence of a personal sorrow.

For all that, the decision of last night was binding; suffer what he might, his first duty was to the generous kinsman who had accepted him as a son.

He spent a solitary day. His uncle and Lord Sainsbury did not return to luncheon, but sent him a message that they had taken a sudden resolution to call upon Sir Walter Earle, a circumstance, illogical as it may appear, that by no means added to Philip's tranquillity.

He spent an hour in wandering vaguely about the gardens, speculating upon the impression that Honor would make on Lord Sainsbury, and going over in his own mind the whole circle of her gifts and graces, with that inherent capacity for self-torment which a hopeless lover possesses.

At length, heartily ashamed of himself, he returned to the house, and taking up his books of systematized study, read and wrote with forced perseverance till the shades of evening began to fall.

Then, with a sensation of almost physical pain gnawing at his heart, none the more tolerable because he tried to ignore or deny it, he pushed aside books and papers, and sitting down to an old piano the library contained, allowed himself the relief of uttering through this finer medium the feelings to which no other expression must be given.

The music to which he was most accustomed served his purpose. The well-known "Miserères" and chants which touch the hearts of careless thousands of English and American strangers who throng the vast area of St. Peter's at Christmas and Eastertide were familiar to him; and there is a certain movement of Bach's—"De Profundis"—which seems to include the whole diapason of human necessity and aspiration.

So well did it respond to the mood of the singer that when the last notes had died under his fingers, he instinctively went back and repeated the whole marvellous passage again. As he brought it a second time to a conclusion, he was startled by a deep sigh of satisfaction from the recesses of a distant chair, and Lord Sainsbury, rising up from it, came toward him in the deepening twilight.

He looked deeply moved.

"Good heavens, Methuen!" he said, "what power helps you to sing like that? You might have the sins and sorrows of a world upon your soul, with faith and courage enough to lay down all the burden at the feet of God! St. Sulpice must have a far wider range of experience than I imagined. But what is the matter? You are displeased?"

"Pardon me, Lord Sainsbury, I think I have every right to be displeased. I believed that I was alone."

His eyes flashed, and his face was white with indignation. His feeling was that a stranger had come in by stealth and read his naked soul. Lord Sainsbury laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"Hear reason," he said. "As I came into the house I heard the sound of a piano, which I could no more resist, when touched as you touched it, than steel can resist the magnet. I was too far off to distinguish your voice at first. It was no fault of mine that you were so engrossed as not to hear me open the door. I simply availed myself of a privilege I had no idea you would begrudge me. I bless the powers who endowed you with such a voice, and the teachers who have had the training of it! Please God, Methuen, you shall be the David to my Saul!"

"I do not understand."

"Sir Giles did not mean to take you at your word last night—there is a touch of almost feminine inconsistency and sensibility about the old man. He desired to see you willing to stay, that it might be in his power to bid you go. I am very pleased you have decided to cast in your lot with mine."

The rest of the evening was taken up in discussions of the now accepted event. Sir Giles stipulated for not more than two years' absence, and constant correspondence.

"You will then come home for good and marry," he said. "You will marry the wife that I shall have spent

the interval in choosing for you. Lord Sainsbury will come home too. The power of resilience he speaks of will have become flaccid by that time, and change will be imperative."

The last words Lord Sainsbury said to Philip the next morning, as they walked up and down the platform at Trichester waiting for the up train, were: "Sir Giles thinks I am not going to start for the next month or two, and I had not the heart to undeceive him. But I have received my marching orders already. We shall sail in ten days' time. You will get your summons by to-morrow's post. Bring your uncle up to town with you. Looking after your outfit will divert his mind. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XV.

"To great and small thing love alike can reach,
And cares for each as all, and all as each.
The rose aye wears the silent thorn at heart,
And never yet might pain for love depart."

—TRENCH.

THERE are periods of time when a month, even a day, may include the issues of a lifetime; and again, in the experience of most of us, long periods occur when the wheels of existence drag slowly and heavily, with little seeming advance upon the onward track.

Honor Aylmer was nineteen years old when Philip Methuen went to India, and her life had been as uneventful as that of most girls of her position who are too carefully guarded for much variety of incident. Too young to remember her parents, her mother's devoted friend, Miss Earle, had accepted and fulfilled the charge of her with such tender fidelity that the girl scarcely missed what she had lost. When Sir Walter Earle's wife died, and Miss Earle was invited by her brother to assume the control of his household, she made it a condition that she might bring her adopted daughter with her, and that henceforth Earlescourt should be considered her home.

It was a happy day for all concerned when the lovely little girl appeared among them. Adrian was at that time twelve years of age, being four years older than Honor, and the younger boy, deformed and crippled

from his birth, was a puny, suffering child of three. From that time to the present she had been the playfellow, nurse, and teacher of the one, and the fellow-student and *bon camarade* of the other, who threw off his mental indolence for the first time when he found how closely the limpid-minded, keen-witted little girl trod upon his footsteps. For the most part the two studied together under the same masters until Adrian went to Brazenose—for the boy, unfortunately for himself, was held to be too delicate for a public school; and even when he had entered upon his Oxford curriculum, Honor did her best to keep pace with him, so far as home teaching allowed. She was one of those girls, becoming increasingly uncommon, for whom study, family affection, and homely interests sufficed; she did not continually demand, as essentials of existence, new books, fresh scenes, and a succession of pleasures. As a matter of social routine she was carefully prepared to play her part in society, and was taken up to town in due course to make her courtesy to her sovereign; and after that event she and Miss Earle spent a month or two in the height of the season at the fine old family house in Arlington Street, while Sir Walter devoted himself to his political duties, and Adrian was their ready attendant at theatres, galleries, and concert-rooms. As Honor was herself a very clever artist and musician, these things drew her with a resistless magnetism, as did also the opportunities she enjoyed of the higher forms of social intercourse which Sir Walter Earle's position naturally provided for her.

But she always returned to Earlescourt with satisfied content, to pursue her favorite studies with a zest which made of the last point gained the starting-place for new attainments, and with her love and sympathy and patience toward poor young Oliver animated by absence to greater devotion. It was indeed well for her that Miss Earle was always on watchful guard to prevent her carrying her ardor too far on both these lines, and to insist on as much open-air exercise and neighborly intercourse as seemed good for body and mind.

It had been a matter of private arrangement between brother and sister that Honor and Adrian should marry if their childish affection could be trained into a feeling of mutual regard, both perceiving that the indolent and self-indulgent young man could have no better incentive

or safeguard in life than the serene and generous steadfastness of the girl who had walked by his side from childhood. At the time they had made Philip Methuen's acquaintance this scheme was pretty well known and accepted by the outside world; and without any definite explanation or engagement, the young people had tacitly acquiesced in it themselves—the one being fully persuaded that a sweeter, more loyal creature never drew the breath of life; and the other, that no woman could ever have Adrian's welfare so near her heart as she herself. Besides, it would please Oliver.

During the long winter which succeeded Philip's departure, Anna Trevelyan lived much at Earlescourt, and ultimately spent weeks there together at a time, being associated by Honor in her own lessons in music and painting. She even gained the entry to Oliver's chamber, and would amuse him by the hour together with rapid and spirited caricatures of every person with whom she had come into contact or even only casually seen; or by passionate descriptions of Florence and its treasures of art and her own wild life in her early past.

She had, too, a certain gift of improvisation which fascinated the boy. It was not worth very much intellectually, but when a strikingly beautiful girl recites with passionate feeling, in an imperfectly understood language, verses or rhetorical apostrophes out of her own head, the listener is not often disposed to be critical. Anna at such times looked magnificent; and the audience was not limited to Oliver, Adrian being constantly in attendance. He also amused himself by teaching her to ride and shoot at a target, accomplishments which she readily acquired and delighted to exercise. It was true that in his delicate, languid way, he often made fun of her and aroused her scornful anger; but she pleased him as much and excited him more in these moods than in her quieter ones.

It was a new thing to him to be in constant intercourse with a girl who was always offering him fresh surprises, and upon whose reception of friendly advances it was impossible to calculate.

Honor, in her turn, found Anna's society stimulating, and was so deeply anxious for her welfare and improvement that she was sometimes at a loss to understand the motive which influenced her. Anna was acutely perceptive, and made rapid progress in any study which it

suited her to pursue; but there was no breadth nor depth in her intellect, not a touch of the humility and veneration without which there is no true discipleship. Also there was in her nature a radical and persistent selfishness, which forbade the hope of any really fair structure being raised on so mean and narrow a foundation.

Oliver Earle, with his keen susceptibility, soon discovered this flaw of character.

"Why do you like Anna Trevelyan, Honor?" he asked one day. "Sometimes I hate her, or should hate her, only she is so splendid to look at."

His eyes dwelt wistfully on Honor's face.

"Don't mind my saying that," he added. "Hers is a *beauté du diable*, as I heard Adrian telling her the other day; yours—how shall I put it? Come close and kiss me, dear!"

She did as he asked, and he saw, what was very unusual, that there were tears in her eyes.

"Yours," he continued, pressing her hand against his cheek, "is more like that of Guercino's Guardian Angel, as Browning puts it. You are one of the 'Birds of God.'"

The feeling of sadness which was associated with Anna in Honor's mind was of so subtle a character as to be difficult to explain. It was no longer because the girl complained of misery or oppression in her aunt's family, for either she had learnt a measure of conformity or the rule of harshness was relaxed. One circumstance alone made a great difference: there was no longer any difficulty in getting her to learn. She was now avid of knowledge such as women of society are conventionally supposed to possess. Then her intimacy with the Earlescourt family counted for much. Mrs. Sylvestre was too diplomatic to put it in the power of her niece to pour forth reasonable complaints in her passionate way to the sympathizing household, nor was she blind to the contingent advantages which accrued to her own children. But Honor was conscious that, with all this intellectual and material improvement, there remained a want in the girl of that finer sense and breadth of aspiration which were necessary to fit her—for what? For that development which Philip Methuen expected.

Anna Trevelyan was one of the few to whom he wrote at long intervals, and these letters she was in the habit of showing to Honor Aylmer, as conferring a certain distinction and establishing that link of connection be-

tween them to which she tenaciously clung. The letters themselves had no strong personal interest except as minute and careful replies to her own.

His clear-sightedness and fidelity in all matters relating to the faults and errors which Anna freely exposed in her correspondence sometimes made Honor smile with an odd feeling of relief from some latent anxiety, and excited a burst of indignant disappointment in Anna.

"In my eyes he has no faults," she said on one occasion. "Why does he not look in the same light at me?"

For the rest, there were intelligent observations on the scenes and circumstances by which he was surrounded, as recorded by a superior mind for the instruction and amusement of an inferior; but of personal or of political details there were none. The fact was, he felt bound to answer the frequent letters he received, and equally bound to moderate the extravagant and erroneous impression of the closeness of their relations which he perceived with anxiety Anna cherished.

These letters formed a curious contrast to those which Philip Methuen wrote by every mail to his uncle, and in which he did his best to daguerreotype his daily life for the satisfaction and amusement of the latter. There was scarcely an interest or an event, personal, social, or political, which was not transcribed for the benefit and interest of this exacting but affectionate kinsman. He showed him how he lived and what he was, with a vivid fidelity which certainly helped to bridge over the distance between them; only reserving that innermost circle of experience which no wise man or woman discloses to any human ken.

And so the uneventful months flowed on till the two years of his absence had been accomplished and the third begun.

During this protracted period the subject of Adrian's and Honor's marriage had been often renewed, but the event, though still regarded in the light of a foregone conclusion, was invariably postponed under some plea or another.

Naturally it was Honor who raised the difficulties, but an ardent lover would soon have disposed of them. Adrian had never been that: his father said with a sneer, born of profound if concealed disappointment, that his temperament was too tepid for any great passion; but

the girl who had known him from a boy, and whose insight was quickened ' oth by her intellect and affection, was of a different opinion.

It was the growth of a strong if not a great passion which was coming between them. She saw the increasing fascination which Anna Trevelyan, to whom each month seemed to bring a finer development of her superb beauty, exercised over him. Adrian had long ceased to rally and reprove, and contented himself now with a close, watchful observation. Honor had studied his face as he sat listening to Anna's improvisations and drawn inevitable conclusions.

During the third season after Methuen's departure Anna had been invited to accompany the Earles to town, and had taken a passionate delight in all the pleasures she could grasp—first and greatest being the admiration she herself everywhere excited.

It was a subject of indignant mortification to Miss Earle to see how entirely the loveliness of her own beloved ward was eclipsed by the defiant beauty and audacious unconventionality of the girl who never seemed to recognize the goodness which had been heaped upon her, or the almost divine patience with which her provocations were endured. It was on this occasion that Adrian, who had often absented himself from his father's town-house during the season, kept his fashionable terms with the greatest assiduity.

He was at Honor's side as companion and convoy perpetually, not only at daylight gatherings and exhibitions, but in the ball-rooms hitherto abhorred and shunned. But Honor at least made no mistakes. It can never be otherwise than painful for a woman to feel herself to be superseded in the favor of the man who once loved her; but she had the courage to recognize and accept the truth before any one else guessed it.

Anna was Honor's unfailing companion on all these occasions, and the latter saw clearly that while Adrian's loyalty constrained him to devote to her the attentions which were her undeniable right, it was on the looks and words of the other, in spite, or it might have been because of, her almost insolent indifference, that his observance hung. Also, she had watched him, after he had scrupulously fulfilled his functions of her partner at some dance, seek Anna's side with a solicitude his eyes never betrayed to her, and perceived that their routine

dances were the price he paid for the rapture of a waltz with the woman he loved.

He grew taciturn, irritable, and uncertain, and threw the blame of his temper on his health, which had never been robust, and talked of a journey round the world. Then Honor Aylmer thought the time to speak was come.

"What good would travel do you, Adrian," she asked, on one of the rare occasions when they were alone together, "if you left behind the thing you wanted, and took with you the burden which I see is wearing out your strength?"

He turned very pale. "What do you mean?" he answered. "I will never give you cause to reproach me, Honor." There was that eager tone of self-justification in his voice which is only another form of inward dissatisfaction.

"Happily," she answered, with an effort which, however, she did not allow to appear, "there will be as little cause as inclination for reproach. We love each other very dearly, Adrian—as fondest brother and sister love; but we are both beginning to find out that something beyond that is wanted for those who are to spend life together. We will set each other free, and change nothing!"

She could see the color come back into his face and the light quicken in his eyes, and involuntarily a little stab smote her. Her love was perhaps deeper than she described; anyway, it gives a pang to a woman's heart to see that a man adds to his happiness when he lets her go.

"Is that the truth," he asked, "or gracious falsehood to reconcile me to my accusing conscience?"

He looked earnestly into the sweet face which met his anxious, inquiring gaze so steadfastly, and then caught her hand in an effusion of gratitude.

"Honor, you have been my good angel since the day your little feet first crossed our door; do not cast me off now! I thank God I read in your dear eyes that it is not in my power to hurt you much; and yet am I not caitiff and poltroon to rejoice that you have not found me worth loving? What has led you to the belief that—that we have both deceived ourselves?"

He questioned her with so eager a solicitude, and with eyes so weary and sad, that had the facts been otherwise

her pity as well as her pride would have withheld the admission. She smiled, but there was a little sorrow and regret tempering the smile.

"I think I was never at any time sure how much I loved you, Adrian, or whether the love I had was of the proper complexion for a wife; but when of late I have watched the expression of your face and heard the tone of your voice when you looked at or spoke to Anna Trevelyan—forgive me, yours is an open secret!—I felt no manner of doubt that you at least were no lover of mine and—the discovery will not break my heart."

"And in not being so I condemn myself," he answered: "those who have walked with angels should at least know how to worship. In revenge, no one knows better than I that Anna Trevelyan is of another sort, yet—I shall waste my life in trying to win her!"

"And she must be very hard to win if she resists you—as lover," said Honor, smiling. "Hitherto you have not been free to try;" and she rose and left him.

The fact of the rupture of the family engagement was declared at once, at Adrian's own request. He was anxious to meet and overcome the disappointment and displeasure he knew it would excite—also to win his father's consent to his choice. Sir Walter Earle, though bitterly annoyed at this fresh failure of his hopes in respect to his son, surprised him by a readier acquiescence than he had ventured to expect, to Miss Earle's indignant amazement, whose own sense of injury, not to say outrage, was intense. Anna preferred to Honor! But the wary baronet, who had enjoyed a long experience of the sex, yielded the point simply because he felt convinced his son had small chance of success. He had watched Anna Trevelyan closely, and was morally certain that it was not given to the delicate and fastidious Adrian to conquer that young lady's arrogance and scorn.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Love of my bonds partook, that I might be
In turn partaker of its liberty.
Oh, merchant at heaven's mart for heavenly ware!
Love is the only coin that passes there."

—TRENCH.

SUCH was the situation of affairs when Philip Methuen returned to England after an absence of almost three years.

Sir Giles, after his departure, fell back into the old habits of seclusion and reserve, which were aggravated by the knowledge he had obtained from an eminent physician, before leaving London, that a malady which had long tormented his comfort, without being seriously regarded, had developed into an incurable and mortal disease.

This fact became known to Mrs. Methuen in her Florentine villa, and at once suggested to her the propriety of offering herself as nurse and companion to the friendless old man—a scheme which she would assuredly have carried out, in spite of his opposition, had not death, in its most sudden and appalling form, stepped between them. She died from the effects of a carriage accident, after a few days' severe suffering, during which she lay taciturn and conscience-stricken, and waited on by no friend nearer or dearer than the old physician Richetti, and her maid, who was only withheld from deserting her mistress by a sense of shame and some hope of reward.

'What a grievous pity,' said Richetti to her an hour or two before she passed away, "that the good son is not here to comfort and sustain my lady!"

"Yes," she answered; "I dare say he would have been almost as kind to me as to that poor creature, Lewis Trevelyan. I hope he will not think so ill of his mother, doctor, as to spend all the little she leaves him in masses for her soul! Give him that message from me if you ever meet."

And this message, sent by Richetti to Sir Giles Methuen, was duly transmitted to Philip, and added another pang to the sharp and mournful memories which, without break or alleviation, were associated with his expe-

riences as a son. It was one note the less of recall to his native land.

Meantime, there was something pathetic in the courage which enabled the failing old baronet to submit to the protracted absence which he felt so keenly, in order not to interrupt a career which was fulfilling the long-delayed hopes and ambition of his life.

Lord Sainsbury had alleged himself to be a man chary of praise and recognition, and doubtless it was the result of a wide and penetrating acquaintance with human nature which led him to accept the best of any man's service as a matter of routine duty. Thus he made no exception in favor of the young man toward whom he felt secretly a strong inclination. But he was none the less a man of generous sensibility, and appreciating to the full the sacrifice Sir Giles had made in parting with his nephew, he rewarded it in a way he knew would please him best. Amid the heavy pressure of public affairs he managed to find time to write him an occasional letter, in which he expressed, with an ardor which would have astonished his best friends, his sense of Philip's intelligence and devotion to whatever work he had in hand.

As time passed, opportunities occurred in connection with a case of suspected treachery in one of the native princes for the display of faculties of a much higher and more serviceable kind than those with which he had at first credited the young man. Methuen developed not only a patient sagacity in threading the mazes of Oriental intrigue, but a subtlety of intuition and resource which promised to place him in the first rank of diplomatists. These gifts, as Lord Sainsbury pointed out to Sir Giles, in conjunction with the (perhaps still rarer) qualities of absolute fidelity and trustworthiness, and the natural charm of manner and person, were surely not intended to be hidden under a bushel, and formed an adequate plea for longer detention of his services.

Then, when the renewed term had expired, an attack of fever, followed by a tedious convalescence, exhausted the Viceroy's strength, and formed an all but irresistible claim upon Philip's gratitude and regard. It was in his power, owing to their intimate relations, to do more for his chief than any other man could have done, and in meeting the appeal, so to increase the affection with which Lord Sainsbury regarded him as to render the reluctance to part with him still more difficult to overcome.

Owing to these circumstances, it was not until Sir Giles Methuen's rapidly failing strength led to serious anxiety among his friends that he took the step of insisting upon his nephew's return, in terms sufficiently peremptory to secure his object. But as soon as this was done, his impatience and restlessness became painfully acute. Philip was coming home overland from Brindisi, having some commissions to execute for Lord Sainsbury in Paris, and this fact was a source of intense irritation to the old man's exhausted patience. It was the last straw which broke the back of his endurance.

It was the height of the London season, and the Earlescourt family were established in town, with Anna Trevelyan as their guest, as before stated. No direct correspondence with Philip Methuen had been kept up by any member of it, all the knowledge they had of his Indian experiences being derived from his letters to Anna, or from those which Sir Giles, in the pride of his heart, occasionally showed to Sir Walter Earle, and which never failed to exasperate the sense of bitter disappointment which the latter felt in regard to his eldest son. Adrian, however, made it his business to ascertain from Sir Giles the time when Philip was expected to arrive in London, and went to Charing Cross to meet him, animated partly by the desire to renew their old relations, partly with the idea of allaying by a short process certain anxieties which sat heavily upon him. The recognition between the two men was instantaneous. Adrian himself scarcely looked a day older than when they parted; and though Methuen was considerably more altered, his personality was of a kind which rendered him easily distinguishable.

As he stood for a few moments on the platform giving brief but incisive instructions about his baggage, which was of considerable amount, the other watched him with something of the critical satisfaction he had felt when his eyes had first fallen upon him in the dim lobby of the vicarage house at Skeffington. A good many other feelings combined to qualify this feeling, however. When one man admits the physical superiority of another, it is not so much on the ground of personal impression as from an instinctive perception of the effect he is calculated to produce on others—notably of the opposite sex.

Adrian, as a lover, acknowledged at once that Anna

Trevelyan, always infatuated on the point, would think Philip handsomer than ever; and, as a son, was equally confident that Sir Walter Earle would find in his manner and bearing indications of all those qualities the absence of which he deplored in himself. Such convictions were not of a kind to add warmth to his greetings, and he had an uneasy sense that his cordiality was half-hearted and constrained.

Philip, however, did not appear to discover any deficiency; he looked at Adrian with just the same expression of animated pleasure that the sensitive self-consciousness of the other had always found so acceptable, and inquired after every member of the family with an affectionate interest which seemed to prove that he had brought back with him precisely the same regard which he took away.

"But we can talk as we drive to the station. Jump in, Adrian; there is not a moment to lose."

"The station! My dear fellow, do you suppose for a moment that you are going anywhere but home with me? I should not dare to show my face in Arlington Street without you. Besides, what man in his senses passes through London in June, after a three-years' absence, without giving himself plenary indulgence?"

Philip's answer was a glance at the railway clock, and the exhibition of a sovereign before the responsive eyes of the cabman.

"If I catch my train at Waterloo this is yours; you have barely eight minutes to earn it." Then turning to Adrian as the cab dashed out of the station, he said, "I am more grieved than I can say to refuse your invitation, but I have timed my journey to catch the down express, and have no option in the matter."

"No option! What difference can four or five hours make to your uncle, who has managed to exist without you all these years? My father will take it as a personal offence, or if he do not, the ladies of the house certainly will. As for me, I look upon it as little short of an insult!"

"Who are the ladies of the house?" said Philip, smiling. "Your aunt, whom I have never seen, and Miss Aylmer, who would sacrifice any personal wish to ease the anxiety of another? You do not quite understand—I have been delayed more than a week in Paris, which has vexed my uncle considerably—that I could not help,

but I will not lose a single hour this side of the Channel. You will explain this at home?"

"Anyway, it is a sorry home-coming! I wish you joy of your return to Methuen Place. Sir Giles will suffer no outsider's foot to cross the threshold; and his temper, I am told, is simply unbearable."

"I am not afraid."

Adrian looked at him with his smile of gentle derision.

"Of course not! You are a man-tamer by profession—witness your success with Lord Sainsbury! My dear Methuen, I have not properly congratulated you. You come back crowned with the distinction of having won the good word of a great man who was never known to praise a little one in his life! 'The thanks of the nation are due'—you see we read the papers!"

"We are too near Waterloo, Adrian, for me to undertake the defence of Lord Sainsbury—the most magnanimous and least understood of men. Come a few stations down the line with me; I have fifty things to say."

"Good! we will take turns at cross-examination. I am only too thankful to have the disposal of a couple of hours taken off my hands."

A few minutes later saw their places secured, and Philip leaned back in the carriage with the sense of relief which comes from a danger escaped; also with a sense of fatigue arising from his unbroken journey from Paris. The latter, however, did not appear.

"Tell me now," he said, looking across at Adrian, "all about yourselves. I remember every dog that crossed my path at Earlescourt! The four weeks I spent there were the happiest weeks in my life—I am half inclined to say it was the only happy month in my life, for I have never had a similar experience. Do things still go on there in the same way?"

"So much so that if you walked into Oliver's room tomorrow, you would think you had only left it yesterday. Honor Aylmer and I, you also perceive, still stand in the same relation as when you went away;" he looked at his companion curiously as he spoke.

"The same? I do not quite understand. You mean that you are not yet married?"

He spoke with a self-command so perfect that it scarcely cost him an effort. During the three arduous years he had spent in India he had succeeded, not indeed in conquering his love—Honor Aylmer would always be

to him the most beloved woman on the face of God's earth—but at least in eliminating from it the selfish element. The highest happiness for her would be the highest happiness for him, though he had no share in the making of it. If at times the doubt forced itself upon his mind that there was not strength enough in Adrian Earle's nature to meet all the requirements of hers, he put it resolutely from him. Who had the power to measure another man's worth, or to decide what qualifications were necessary to a woman's satisfaction? She would meet all the duties of life with a heart and temper adequate to their perfect fulfilment, and that was simply his own business—on harder lines.

To transmute into the fine gold of willing self-renunciation every baser ingredient of his love, so as to attain wider reaches of sympathy and patience and clearer perceptions of what wounds and heals was not precisely a task he deliberately set himself—for such results do not come by system or calculation—but an end naturally reached by a man who subjected every faculty and inclination to the law of duty.

Fresh from such training as this, he was perfectly able to bear without flinching Adrian's direct mention of his relations with Honor; but his next remark tried Methuen's fortitude much more severely.

"When I say the same," Adrian continued, "I mean our relations are in fact unchanged. We are very fond of each other still, as brother and sister, and we never cared for each other in any other way. Our engagement is broken off by mutual consent, and each of us has a lighter heart in consequence."

Philip had no answer at command. The reaction in his scourged and disciplined mind was so great—like that of a man hopelessly blind opening his eyes suddenly on a sun-lighted landscape—that the keen rapture was scarcely to be distinguished from pain. His former submission had been absolute, but he was quite as capable as other men of rejoicing that the ordeal for which he had braced his courage was not after all to be exacted.

"I am so taken by surprise," he said at last—Adrian's cynical look supplying the stimulus he wanted—"that I cannot decide what I ought to say on the subject; at least I—I earnestly hope that Miss Aylmer is well?"

Adrian laughed. "You could scarcely hope less! She is perfectly well, and as sweet and fair as when you

saw her last—she could not be more so! But—you do not ask about Anna Trevelyan, Methuen—that strikes me as odd.”

“Anna has continually kept me informed of her affairs, and I have even received some official communications from Mrs. Sylvestre. I am at a loss to express my sense of the kindness your family have shown her—it is an obligation which can only be felt and acknowledged, but never repaid.”

“May I ask why you appropriate the obligation? I am not going on farther than Weybridge, but before we part I want to be satisfied on a certain point: Is there any kind of engagement between you and Anna Trevelyan which would prevent any other man trying to do his best to win her?”

“There is no engagement of any kind between us.”

Philip spoke almost sternly, and there was an air of solicitude in the look with which he met Adrian’s animated glance which caused the latter the most intense irritation.

“Have you any word of disparagement to utter of the girl whom you have befriended from a child, and who repays your services with the most disproportionate gratitude? Do you find some difficulty in wishing me success with the woman I love?”

“I find no difficulty, my dear Adrian, in wishing you success in any scheme which you think will make for your happiness, but I do not hesitate to say I deeply regret that you should look for it in this direction.”

“You mean that—I have no chance?” hiding under a sneer his secret anxiety.

“I mean nothing of the kind. It would be hard to think of you as failing with any woman whom you wished to please. I simply mean that—Anna Trevelyan is not worthy of you, and that you will find out that she is not worthy of you should she ever become your wife. I say this with pain and reluctance, but I should be false to our friendship if I left it unsaid.”

“Understand—you must never dare to say it again!”

Adrian spoke with his face white with anger, and his voice and manner were almost menacing.

“Once is enough,” answered Philip quietly; “no threat is wanted to insure my silence in the future.” He stopped, as the train at this point slackened speed, and the other rose with passionate precipitation.

"Do you really get out here, and—do you refuse to shake hands?"

"Not if you will withdraw what you have just now said, otherwise—you and I cease to be friends!"

"On that point you can only speak for yourself. I shall never cease to be your friend, but I cannot retract words deliberately spoken."

Adrian opened the door and jumped out; an express train cuts short controversies as well as courtesies. He was very angry, with the chivalrous anger of a knight whose lady has been traduced, and toward whom it consequently behooves to augment his own reverence and devotion. He said to himself, with the sort of feminine petulance which at times marked his conduct, that not many hours should pass before he put his fate to the touch, and his future in the hands of the girl whom Philip Methuen pronounced unworthy of him.

CHAPTER XVII.

"All men do err, because that men they be;
And men with beauty blinded cannot see."

—PEELE.

"Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
And all my soul, and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart."

—SHAKESPEARE'S *Sonnets*.

ADRIAN'S temper was by no means mollified on his return home by the reception given to his news of Methuen's summary departure. Sir Walter Earle, who had a considerable share of curiosity to satisfy, as well as goodwill to express, felt himself decidedly aggrieved; Miss Earle, who had a deep-rooted dislike to paragons, and a generous resentment against the allowed superiority of this paragon in particular, characterized his conduct as ostentatious and affected; and the two girls, Honor and Anna, were each in their way profoundly disappointed.

Honor felt a secret shame and pain that she had looked forward with such strong interest to again meeting a man who had proved his own indifference to the memories of the past; and Anna complained bitterly, as was her wont, and with the manner assumed by those who consider themselves robbed of their rights.

Infatuated as Adrian Earle was, interpreting her moods and manifestations with an ingenious self-delusion, at which Love himself must have laughed, he could not persuade himself, as his anger cooled, to risk the overthrow of all his hopes while Anna barely showed him civility.

This girl was precisely of the nature to hold cheap what was pressed on her acceptance; and the more patient and obvious was any man's devotion the more scornful and negligent would her behavior become.

The one justification of the heartlessness of her conduct was to be found in the singular and engrossing passion (for no other word would fitly describe the nature of her regard) which she felt for Philip Methuen. All the little there was of good in her went to the making of it—the inexpressible bond of early association, and of an imaginative and neglected child's gratitude for great and unaccustomed kindness, as shown not only to herself, but to the dear, never-to-be-forgotten father. It might be said she owed to Methuen every good gift in life she had received, from the time when she had learned her letters at his knees to the present hour, which saw her, equally through his efforts, fitted to take her stand in society as any man's equal. It was he who induced Mrs. Sylvestre to receive her, and had engaged Honor Aylmer's serviceable kindness in her behalf. To him she acknowledged she owed her first glimpses of moral and spiritual truth, though they were of very little abstract importance in her reckoning except as opening channels for more frequent and intimate association.

In the past she had been the recipient only; in the future she was to equalize their relations by the gift of herself.

She had grown up from childhood with the impression that he belonged to her, having pledged himself to lifelong affection and devotion to her interests; her father had died leaning on these assurances, and there was only one way of fulfilling them. There was so much of that Italian blood in her veins that even if the conviction of his indifference had been brought home to her mind, she would still have been prepared to insist on her rights and overwhelm his reluctance. As the case stood, she considered beauty the master-element of love; and had not kind nature made her, Anna Trevelyan, too beautiful for any man to resist?

On the plane of physical perfection, she allowed Philip Methuen to be her equal. As a very young girl, she distinctly remembered her father's observations on this point: he would often express a thorough contempt for Philip's devout piety and exaggerated unselfishness; but on the theme of his personal strength and beauty, he would dilate with the uncompromising zeal of a passionate artist steeped in materialism. Can we blame her that, regarding her father as a being of a higher order than herself—it was a grain of saving salt in her character—she imbibed such notions with the tenacity of her age, and ever afterward, more or less, graduated her estimates by them?

If any one, knowing the secrets of her heart—and she was discreet enough to be secret—had expostulated with Anna Trevelyan on the unwomanliness and indelicacy of her position, she would have laughed such scruples to scorn. What was life but the brief term of human existence, into which the wise and the fortunate press all that they can of personal gratification?

Her happiness rested on one basis—union with the man she loved, and no conventional difficulties or ethical scruples should prevent her turning to her own advantage every chance and circumstance in her favor.

That he had passed through London without coming to see her, and being subjected to the influences of her perfected beauty—for no one knew better than Anna herself what the last three years had done for her—was a provocation hard to bear, the only consolation being that Honor Aylmer had been equally powerless to attract him. She had the glaring indelicacy to question Adrian Earle closely in respect to the changes and improvements which time had wrought in Methuen's personal appearance, and he the almost inconceivable blindness to attribute such eagerness to the innocent ardor of her childish friendship. To be sure, he might be excused for thinking that the delicate and subtle passion he recognized as love could never take so bold a front.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that the women of the Earlescourt family were not equally blind to Anna Trevelyan's shortcomings. Miss Earle entertained a robust and uncompromising dislike to the beautiful, defiant girl who accepted favors as her right and repudiated the obligation of gratitude. The delicate generosity of all the rest of the family was in opposition to her,

or she would certainly have shut the door of intimacy against Anna Trevelyan long before the infatuation of her nephew served her as a weapon of offence in her indignant controversies with her brother.

Sir Walter Earle had implicit faith in his own theory that it was best to give a red-hot lover his head, and that no one but Anna herself would be able to cure Adrian of his folly. He was so convinced that his son had no chance of success with the girl, as to consider himself able to act the part of indulgent parent with perfect safety.

To Honor Aylmer's mind the character of her so-called friend was not so much matter for repulsion or condemnation as of a sort of divine pity and regret. That a girl so splendidly endowed should lack, as she well knew she lacked, every quality of the soul which makes for righteousness—all the finer instincts and desires which lift humanity out of the brutal element incorporate with it—seemed infinitely more pitiable than any physical deformity or deficiency could have been. It pierced her tender heart that the sweet and sensitive Adrian should lavish his love on a girl who was as indifferent to his homage as any Buddhist idol to its Hindu worshipper; and she was cruelly divided between the wish that he might get the desire of his heart, and the conviction that his success would be the worst thing which could happen to him.

On the other hand, to associate the idea of Philip Methuen with Anna was, if possible, still more repugnant to her feelings. So absolute was the incongruity, that it would be, morally, like binding the living to the dead; but here she consoled herself with the belief that no such catastrophe was to be apprehended. He was strong enough to take care of himself.

A few days after Philip's return to Skeffington, he wrote to Sir Walter Earle apologizing for his apparent neglect of his kindness, and stating that he had found his uncle so much worse than he had expected that it would be for the present quite impossible to leave him; consequently, he had been obliged to dismiss the hope of making his explanation in person.

This letter decided Anna Trevelyan to cut short her visit to her friends and return home at once to the vicarage. Her desire, or rather her determination to see Philip Methuen at once, and place their relations on a

more certain and recognized basis, was growing to an intolerable height; and since there was now no chance of meeting him in town, she had no longer a wish to remain there. The difficulties of her position seemed rather to stimulate than restrain her purpose.

It was obvious to Anna that, when she declared her intentions, the Earle family expressed no more reluctance at the prospect of her departure than kindness and courtesy demanded—a circumstance that, in her passionate and unreasonable mind, went far to wipe out the long record of services received.

On the evening before her departure, it happened that Adrian, coming in early after a weary afternoon spent by stress of social necessity at Lord's, found Anna alone in the drawing-room.

She was sitting indolently reclining among the many cushions of a low couch, with that air—half-weary, half-scornful—which was characteristic of her. She held an open book between her fingers; but she seldom read consecutively, and needlework was never seen in her hands except under Mrs. Sylvestre's compulsion. Her attire struck Adrian's fastidious eye as in exquisite keeping with her beauty. She wore a dark crimson gown, the soft fabric of which, unbroken by flounce or frill, fell in straight, statuesque folds to her feet, defining the noble lines and curves of her perfect form.

She raised her eyes as Adrian entered, and dropped them again immediately without speaking. He was looking worn and wan, and there was an intense repressed irritability in his manner. His face lightened, however, at the sight of her.

"Alone, Anna!"

"You see I am alone. Miss Earle and Honor are at Lady Isbister's concert. I saw the card of invitation. My name was not mentioned, but yours was. Why are you not there?"

"I was going, but I have changed my mind. What is Lady Isbister's concert to me in comparison with this room with you in it? Anna, what am I to say to you? I have held my peace till the fire burns. If I speak too soon, I cannot help it; but—be kind to me!"

He pulled a chair close to her sofa and sat down. He was jaded in body and mind and intoxicated by her beauty. One of her arms, bare to the elbow, was carelessly thrown over the padded side of the couch, and

looked lustrous as the evening light fell upon it. Adrian stooped suddenly and pressed his lips upon the soft, warm flesh, in an eager, burning kiss.

"I love you! I love you! I love you!" he repeated, with passionate iteration. "Anna, I say again—be kind to me!"

The girl sprang up from her seat with as vehement a movement of angry recoil as if some noisome creature had touched her. She rubbed her handkerchief with almost savage energy on the spot his lips had pressed, and looked at him with her eyes dilating and her delicate nostrils quivering under her sense of outrage.

"How dare you insult me like that? Have I ever wanted your love, or tried to please you as other girls do? Has there ever been a look, or word, or touch of mine that could encourage you to expect anything from me? You know there has not—that if behavior could kill love, yours by this time should have no life in it! It is what I have tried for—to appear so hateful that you should cease to care for me!"

The passion of her repudiation stung his manhood to a measure of self-assertion.

"And why have you done this?" he asked, straightening his figure and meeting her flashing eyes without wavering. "Why has my love no value to you? What right have you, above other women, to reject it with anger and scorn? What I offer you is the best a man has to give."

"That does not matter, when the gift is unacceptable! I do not mean to hurt or insult you more than another. I hold every man's love cheap, simply because I do not want it."

She paused a minute, as if searching for reasons, then added quickly:

"Besides, I am quite sure you would never persuade your family and friends to give me a welcome."

A sudden flicker of hope sprang up in his heart, and his face brightened.

"I have my father's full permission to win you, if I can."

"It is very good of Sir Walter Earle to give you leave," she answered, scornfully; "but I shall not put his magnanimity to the test, and you must quite clearly understand that I mean every word I have just now spoken, and that this subject must never be mentioned between

us again. Shall I tell you what you had better do? Make up your quarrel with Honor Aylmer; no other woman will ever suit you half so well."

"Ah," he answered; "that comes either of your ignorance of what love is, or of the insolence of your youth and beauty. Honor Aylmer is a better woman than you, and almost as handsome; but it is you—you only—that I want, Anna"—he came a little nearer to her, moved by the instinct of appeal—"there is nothing your heart can desire that it will not be in my power to give you. You shall order our lives as you like—on any lines, in any lands—only I must have your love!"

"Have you, then, some love-philter at command?" was her answer. "You bribe high, Mr. Earle; but you may have read as well as I that love is not to be bought, nor will it come at word of command. What am I to say to you? If you could give me all the kingdoms of the earth, as well as Earlescourt, I would not marry you!"

His face flushed with pain and anger. "It will not be necessary to say much more; there is a limit even to my subserviency; you leave me no loophole for self-deception. I will give it up, Anna, but—you shall tell me for whom!"

The color faded out of his face, and a light came into his eyes which she had never seen there before, and which fascinated her gaze—his voice even had taken a tone of harshness quite foreign to its habitual sweetness. "For whose sake," he added incisively, "do you treat me with this insufferable arrogance? Is it for Philip Methuen's?"

He caught her hand as he spoke, not from any motive of endearment, but as if to make sure that she should stand and abide his question; and he searched her face with a hard scrutiny which it was difficult for even her to encounter without flinching.

A flame of color suddenly dyed the pure pallor of her skin, but the very consciousness of her involuntary weakness was a challenge to her courage. She met Adrian's peremptory, relentless gaze with a superb movement of defiance.

"Yes," she answered, giving to each word she spoke a metallic clearness of utterance; "you have guessed right, though you had no right to guess—it is for Philip Methuen's sake."

An indefinable expression came over Adrian's face;

he dropped her hand and turned a little aside. Love and hate, pity and revenge—passions hitherto unknown to his experience—divided his heart between them. No sweet reasonableness governed his love for Anna Trevelyan: he loved her because her beauty, audacity, and brilliant gifts stirred the languid pulses of his soul; and such love is not scrupulous as to the means of satisfaction.

Why should he not help himself in his defeat to the weapons Methuen had inadvertently put into his hands? Why? Because the bias of character, and the instincts of a gentleman do not yield to the first assaults of temptation, even of a temptation so potent as his.

"It was a question I had no right to ask," he said, after a pause; "but your answer is conclusive. I have done, Anna."

She felt for him more under this new aspect of restraint and forbearance—felt, by instinct, that a deeper depth had been stirred than she had suspected. She went up to him and touched his arm with her hand.

"Do not hate me for what I have said! I should not like to think of you in the future as unhappy, when things will be so different with me. But—you don't take things very much to heart."

He smiled a little, and put her hand gently to his lips.

"I have done with protestations, Anna. But a time may come in your life when you may stand in need of comfort—if it should, send for me! I shall always love you as I love you now."

He opened the door noiselessly after his fashion, and went out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Rarely, rarely comest thou
Spirit of delight;
Wherefore hast thou left me now
Many a day and night?"

—SHELLEY.

"The persons whose tempers are most distinguished for bigotry are those which have drunk most sparingly, if at all, of the water of life."

ON the afternoon of the following day, Anna Trevelyan stepped out on the platform of Trichester station and looked eagerly about her. The scene had become

very familiar to her: it was now nearly four years since she had seen it first, and she had outgrown or overcome much of the childish misery of those days. Life lay before her, touched with a radiance almost as warm and as penetrating as the midsummer sun over her head. Only at this precise moment a shade was certainly thrown across her path, and was reflected in the angry gloom of her face.

The station-master, who was well acquainted with her, and with her intimacy with the Earlescourt family, came forward civilly to speak to her.

"Miss Sylvestre is waiting outside in the pony-carriage, Miss Trevelyan; there is a cart for your luggage."

"Is there no one else?" asked Anna. "I will wait a few minutes."

The man hesitated. "Shall I speak to Miss Sylvestre?" he asked. "It is Miss Dorothy Sylvestre."

A frown of impatience contracted the girl's forehead; she was suffering from intense mental strain.

"I will speak to her myself," she answered; and going outside the station, where Dorothy sat patiently waiting in the little, low-backed basket-carriage, which always moved Anna's contempt, she stooped over her and kissed her quickly, as if anxious to meet, almost to anticipate, her greetings. "I am glad it is you, Dolly, but I am not quite ready. Will you mind waiting a few minutes?"

"I don't mind waiting a bit; only mamma said we were to make haste home, so as not to keep them waiting for tea." Then her innocent blue eyes wandered admiringly over her cousin's person. "How beautiful you look, Anna, and what a lovely gown! Wasn't it a pity to travel in it?"

Anna's clouded eyes were traversing the high-road which led in the direction of Skeffington, so far as they were able to follow it, but neither pedestrian nor vehicle was in sight. The passengers by the late train were rapidly dispersing, the driver of the railway omnibus being the last to move off, putting his whip to his hat as he passed the Skeffington ladies.

The little lad who had driven the light cart which fulfilled so many functions in the modest Sylvestre household had helped the porter to deposit Anna's boxes and wraps in it, and now stood waiting for the word of command. Anna gave it at last with the haughty, unsympathetic air which was characteristic of her, and after a

further interval of moody watchfulness, at last took her place beside Dorothy.

"Put the thing in motion!" she said. "We shall scarcely get home before dark."

Dolly obeyed, with a half-shy glance at her cousin.

"Are you vexed about coming home?" she asked. "I am afraid mamma is not pleased. Do you mind telling me why you did not stay longer?"

"Because I discovered it was time to come home, if I did not mean to wear out my welcome. By the way—wonders will never cease!—I see the pony has got a new collar."

"Yes," cried Dorothy, brightening, "I was sure you would notice it. Doesn't he look nice?"

"One degree less abject than usual," said Anna, ungraciously. "Do you know, Dolly, I would positively prefer to walk the eight miles' distance than drive in such a miserable little rattle-trap as this! I feel the same contempt for myself as every one else feels who looks at us. It is as incongruous as it would be to see a beggar or a pauper lolling in one of the Earles' fine carriages."

"It is an incongruity you will have to put up with, or else return to the friends you have left," returned her cousin with some spirit; but at the same moment Anna suddenly snatched the reins from her hands.

"Not that way," she said harshly; "we will drive through the park."

"If we do," replied Dolly—knowing from previous experience that opposition would be useless—"it will be only fair for you to take the blame on yourself. Mamma is sure to question us, and it will be a bad beginning for your return home."

"I can bear it," said Anna; but even as she spoke her voice fell a little, and the tears of her bitter disappointment gathered in her eyes. No further appeal was wanted.

"Keep the reins," said Dolly, softly, "while I open the gate."

Anna accepted the arrangement as a matter of course.

"Drive slowly," she said, as Dolly resumed her place beside her, "and stop a minute when we are in sight of the house. We shall be at the vicarage only too soon."

"Papa says the gardens never used to be kept in such exquisite order," remarked Dolly, flicking off the flies from her pony's neck as he stood panting at his ease on

the crest of the little hill which commanded a view of Methuen Place; "but to me it never looks a bit changed. When Mr. Methuen came home a week or two ago from India, after three years' absence, I wonder if he saw any difference?"

"Have you seen him?" asked Anna, sharply, searching the front of the house and the terrace on which the rooms opened with a scrutiny from which not even a sparrow would have been able to escape.

"No one has seen him, I believe, but Mr. Oliver. Poor Sir Giles is dangerously ill, and worse since Mr. Methuen came home. Doesn't it seem a pity! They say he never leaves his uncle."

Anna turned very pale. "Dangerously ill! Do you mean he will not get any better? I notice the fountain is not playing."

"It is too near Sir Giles' window, and he cannot bear the sound of the water," explained Dolly. "Dr. Farquhar told mamma."

"Drive on, Dolly, and make haste home; there is nothing to wait for."

The village and vicarage-house of Skeffington look as little changed for the four years during which Anna had known it as the old gray mansion-house of the Methuens. The ivy had climbed a little higher up the square church tower, and the myrtle-tree which covered the side-walls of the parsonage had increased the bulk of its stem and taken a deeper tone upon its lustrous twigs. The gnarled branches of the old apple-trees in the orchard had given themselves another twist, and the moss and lichen were thicker upon them; but the garden itself, with its small circular grass-plat and trim borders, was as stiff and unattractive as ever. The blossoming shrubs in which Anna delighted, and which relieved it from absolute ugliness, had flowered and faded away early in the forward spring, and had nothing now to show her but their dull foliage; and Mrs. Sylvestre's gaunt geraniums and ill-grown fuchsias still stood in their ugly wire receptacles under the porch, precisely as they had done on the night when Philip Methuen made his first appeal on behalf of her niece.

As Anna got out of the pony-carriage and went into the house, she had an impatient, weary impression of the unchanged conditions of her life, and of the time having arrived when they were becoming unbearable.

Mrs. Sylvestre rose from her seat and took a few steps to meet her across the floor of her drawing-room, meagre and colorless as ever. It seemed to the girl that no change whatever had passed over the pale, keen face, with its prominent blue eyes, thin lips, and high narrow forehead, over which the skin seemed too tightly drawn to admit of lines or wrinkles, since the miserable day when she had first seen it. Also, oddly enough, her first words were almost identical with those she had spoken on that occasion.

"Make haste and take off your things, Anna; your uncle is come in, and tea has been waiting for some time."

Anna paused, then asked, in a clear, firm voice:

"Are there any letters for me?" and met Mrs. Sylvestre's cold gaze of surprise with the defiant composure which that lady was wont to characterize as effrontery.

"As there is only one family with whom you correspond, and you have just left their roof, for reasons still to be explained, I am at a loss to understand from whom you could expect a letter."

"Does that mean there are no letters for me?" repeated Anna.

"There are no letters for you," replied her aunt, sternly, and surveying her with growing dissatisfaction, not only because her inquiry was a suspicious one, and would need to be investigated, but also because she could not blind herself to the fact that not a month passed over the girl's head without adding something to the perfection of a beauty she could neither deny nor forgive.

Anna went slowly upstairs and sat down in the window-seat of her bedroom, as she had done on the first day of her arrival; and if she did not bow her head on her hands and weep, it was only because she had gained a little since then in self-control. She was quite miserable enough.

Dolly had already put away her hat and jacket, and was smoothing her fair hair before the glass. How meagre and despicable looked all the appointments of the room, in Anna's angry sight!

"Anna, dear," said her cousin, timidly, "won't you get ready for tea?"

Anna dashed off her hat, and unwound from her stately throat the magnificent scarf of black Spanish lace, which

made the only difference between her indoor and outdoor toilet: it was one of Honor's frequent and little-considered gifts. Then she suddenly clasped her hands before her eyes as if to shut out the sight of external things.

"I don't think I can bear it!" she cried, in a low, inward voice, charged with the passionate irritability from which she was suffering.

Even the gentle spirit of Dolly rebelled a little.

"Bear what?" she asked. "What I and Lucy and Mary bear all the year round? What did you expect to find when you came home? You know how things always go on. I can't understand why you didn't stay longer with the Earles—it is so odd to leave London in June!"

The words recalled Anna to a sense of discretion: if she were to carry out the vague purpose she had in view, she must be careful to keep her own counsel.

It was by no means impossible for her to play a part when she recognized the necessity of doing so, and for the rest of the evening she did her best to behave in such a way as should serve to disarm her aunt's already excited suspicions and win her young cousin's good-will. She lavished upon the latter trinkets and dainty accessories of dress which had cost her nothing, and to which she was constitutionally indifferent: endured Mrs. Sylvestre's cross-examination respecting the London *ménage* of the Earlescourt family, and her uncle's prosy inquiries as to the business of the "House," on which subject he seemed to expect Anna's information to be authoritative, on the strength of her occasional presence in the Ladies' Gallery.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the scheme which this ardent and self-willed girl was planning was the gaining of an interview with Philip Methuen; but the difficulties which beset it baffled her ingenuity.

It happened that at this time Dr. Farquhar, the chief medical practitioner of Trichester, and Sir Giles' daily attendant, was also visiting her youngest cousin, Mary, for some temporary ailment; and as Mrs. Sylvestre's repugnance to the faith of the master of Methuen Place did not go far enough to destroy her interest in his condition and affairs, Anna had the limited satisfaction of hearing something that helped to guide her conclusions.

Dr. Farquhar was a short, stout, red-faced man, whose general appearance suggested the idea of a well-to-do

country farmer rather than of a professional man of some considerable distinction; but no acute observer who had read the signs of the close, well-cut mouth, of the gray eyes deep set in their sockets, and keen and clear with the vigilance of an intelligence which never seemed to slumber or sleep, and of the huge forehead with its equal development of the reflective and perceptive faculties (to borrow the helpful phrases of an obsolete science), would have agreed with the popular judgment. It may also have been strengthened by the fact that Dr. Farquhar's manners were a little harsh and abrupt, lacking entirely the deliberate courtesy and bland solicitude which are so influential an element of success with the average patient. His relations with the Sylvestre household were by no means intimate, and he was very chary of communicating any information respecting his professional experiences. He, however, allowed that the condition of Sir Giles Methuen, he being the great man of the neighborhood, might excite a little legitimate curiosity.

In this way Mrs. Sylvestre learned that the old baronet was supposed to be gradually sinking, and that his nephew was in constant attendance upon him; and these facts, when they reached Anna's ears, seemed to close the door of hope against her. Even she could not entertain the idea of forcing her way into Methuen Place under such circumstances. Also, she was keenly aware of the necessity of concealing the depth of interest she took in the matter; she seldom saw Dr. Farquhar herself, and if she had seen him, she dared not betray herself by direct inquiry. And so the weary, fruitless weeks passed on.

To add to her anxiety, the Earle family returned in due course to Earlescourt—or at least Miss Earle and Honor returned. Sir Walter had gone direct to his Scotch shooting-box as soon as Parliament rose; and Adrian, it was said, had accompanied him—at any rate, he was not at Earlescourt. Anna was in constant apprehension of Mrs. Sylvestre becoming aware of her changed relations with her former friends, for she knew by instinct the facts would excite her violent displeasure and disappointment; and this anxiety led to rather more propriety of behavior toward her aunt, which was not without its effect on the general tranquillity.

The year had now worn on to the middle of August,

nearly two months since Philip Methuen had returned from India, and still they had never met. Anna would have thought such a thing impossible at the time when she first returned to Skeffington, but fate, she said to herself, was against her. The long strain, however, was telling, if not upon her health, which was of too vigorous a type to yield readily under mental pressure, upon her looks, and she was conscious that her cheek was thinner and paler, and her eyes had lost something of their brightness.

It happened that Dr. Farquhar made the same observation on one of the rare occasions when Anna was in the room during his professional call. He was taking leave of his little patient, more in the character of friend than physician, and consequently Mrs. Sylvestre had not thought it necessary to dismiss her niece as usual.

"I hope you won't accuse me of wanting to fill Miss Mary's vacant place, Mrs. Sylvestre, if I venture to remark that this young lady is not looking well," he said, with a pleasant smile, glancing toward Anna, who was standing languidly leaning against the open window.

Mrs. Sylvestre turned sharply round and looked at her.

"My niece enjoys excellent health, Dr. Farquhar. She is in the habit of boasting she never had a headache in her life! There is nothing the matter with you, Anna, I believe?"

The tone was so hard and confident that it would have needed some courage to contradict her belief, and Anna's energies were at a low ebb. Also, she hated the idea of being considered sick or ill.

"Nothing," she replied, "except the heat;" and then she added, with sudden resolution:

"Poor old Sir Giles Methuen must find this weather hard to bear."

For once, Mrs. Sylvestre was willing to follow her niece's lead; she thought it was Anna's way of turning the doctor's attention from herself, and was prepared to commend her discretion.

"An old man's blood runs colder in his veins than yours, my dear young lady; I don't think Sir Giles Methuen suffers much from the heat."

"Is that unfortunate young man still in attendance upon him?" asked Mrs. Sylvestre, in the harsh, grating tone which she instinctively adopted when touching upon the Methuen theme. "Why does not his uncle

provide himself with a professional nurse—is it selfishness or economy?”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Sylvestre, I don’t quite catch your meaning. In what way is Mr. Methuen, with his splendid prospects and—such as he is—to be considered unfortunate?”

“I allude to the lamentable circumstances of his education. Perhaps you may not be aware—it does not, of course, fall within your function—that he is more, far more, deeply dyed in superstition than the old baronet himself? The gifts of fortune or of nature, you will allow, Dr. Farquhar, will scarcely compensate for this.”

“I have no opinion on such points; they do not, as you say, come within my function; but if it is the province of superstition to turn out such men as Philip Methuen, my experience inclines me to the wish that it were a little more generally influential.”

“I am astonished, doctor, to hear you express yourself so lightly! I do not deny that there are points of attraction in Sir Giles Methuen’s nephew; but if such is the case under the influence of a demoralizing and soul-crushing religion, what might not such a young man have become if he had enjoyed the privilege of being brought up in the true faith?”

“That is a question neither of us can answer, Mrs. Sylvestre,” said the doctor, smiling a little impatiently. “But you seemed anxious on the score of his comfort. I assure you he is in excellent health and condition—takes sufficient exercise, sees his friends at Earleswood occasionally, and duly goes to church.”

“To church—to mass, do you mean? But I understood he never left his uncle’s room.”

“Then, my dear madame, you must have understood that we had all taken leave of our senses. Sir Giles, I cannot help telling you, behaves more like a saint than a sinner, and would be the last to exact injurious devotion from his heir; on the contrary, their mutual consideration and affection, perfectly simple and unostentatious, is a lesson to all of us. As for the professional nurse you appear to consider necessary, the poor old baronet is so reduced, a child almost might lift him; and I assure you neither his servant, housekeeper, nor Mr. Methuen himself, would allow any stranger to touch him. Pray set your mind at ease; the sick-room is quite sufficiently manned.”

Mrs. Sylvestre was silent for a moment, and she did not observe that Dr. Farquhar's eyes were closely observing Anna's downcast face and the nervous movement of her fingers, which she was clasping and unclasping in suppressed excitement.

"Were you aware," she resumed, with some hesitation, "that the vicar called a little while ago at Methuen Place, and was denied admission to the sick-room?"

"You must blame me for that! Nurses are bound to obey orders, and mine are decisive against visitors. But I believe your husband had no reason to complain of his reception—he saw Mr. Methuen and took no offence."

Mrs. Sylvestre shook her head.

"Extreme forbearance is my husband's weak point. But the responsibility of cutting off that old man from perhaps his last chance of spiritual enlightenment was too serious to be incurred for the sake of any mere physical advantage."

She made another little pause; but Dr. Farquhar had no mind to take up the challenge. Anna, who was tongue-tied for fear of self-betrayal, felt an emotion of positive gratitude toward her aunt when she asked presently, as if still brooding over the melancholy condition of her neighbors:

"You said the young man went to church. Do you mean, to that deplorable little barn at Crawford—in Carshalton Street, I think—which is dignified by its worshippers with the name of a chapel?"

"The same; though if you were acquainted with the inside as well as the out, you might correct your estimate. You will be pleased to hear he takes his constitutional every morning, rain or shine, to some early celebration, which is held before our good vicar is up—sitting up at nights seems to make no difference. Somehow, Mrs. Sylvestre, that quiet, unobtrusive sort of observance counts."

"Yes, as the mechanical prayers of the Mohammedan count, and the devotional *katoos* of the Chinaman groveling before his god—not otherwise. I must own it vexes me a little, Dr. Farquhar, that my niece should have listened to your commendation of Roman Catholics; it has been our object ever since she was under this roof to weaken the pernicious influences of her youth."

"I don't think I have done her much harm, or that there is much the matter with her, after all," was the

doctor's answer, as he shot his keen glance again in her direction.

Her figure had lost its languid droop, her whole aspect had undergone a change. An eager vitality now lighted up the face which had been so pale and spiritless a few moments before. When she shook hands with him, the firm, flexible fingers closed over his with an unmistakable grasp of good-will, and the intense, indefinable look in her beautiful eyes almost sent a thrill into the celibate doctor's case-hardened heart.

"There is something in it," he said to himself, as he climbed carefully into his saddle—the well-groomed and well-trained cob having stood during his visit patiently tethered to the vicarage garden-gate—"how much, I do not precisely see; but there is another point I do see with remarkable precision—that Anna Trevelyan is—well—let us say, such a young woman as one does not meet every day in one's life."

CHAPTER XIX.

"One morning, oh! so early, my beloved, my beloved,
All the birds were singing blithely, as if never they would cease;
Let my voice be heard, that asketh not for fame and not for glory,
Give for all our life's dear story,
Give us Love, and give us Peace!"

—JEAN INGELOW.

"DOLLY," said Anna, as the two girls entered their bedroom together soon after the ten-o'clock reading of family prayers, and general dismissal of the household to bed, "come and sit down by me; I have something to tell you. You are not sleepy, I hope?"

Dolly was sleepy: she had been trained to go to bed at a certain hour, and Nature of course accommodated herself to the discipline; also days of uneventful incident and dull routine are perhaps more exhausting than is generally supposed. There is no weariness so intense as that which comes of monotony.

"Something to tell me?" she answered, with a little quickening of interest. "Is it about Adrian Earle?"

Anna made a gesture of repudiation; her movements were always wonderfully expressive. The slight flush that came into her face was not likely to be detected by

the light of the solitary candle, which was considered quite sufficient for bedroom illumination by Mrs. Sylvestre's economy.

"Put out the candle, Dolly," interposed Anna, with a fine accent of contempt (she always expressed herself as if her early experiences had been on a scale of wealth and splendor); "the moon is almost full," drawing up the blind as she spoke, and throwing open the window; "who could want to go to bed on such a night as this?"

She leaned out of the window as far as safety would admit, into the pure illumined air, and drew a deep breath of irrepressible desire. Her whole being responded to the influences of the night: the moon was so bright that she could distinguish the gleam of the distant sea at the point she knew well where to look for it; the low range of hills, with their twin master-peaks, showed blackly against the heavenly background; and the shadows of the trees and fore-front of the house lay motionless on the grass. Now and again there was a faint stir in the branches, as some drowsy bird swerved or shifted its position, and through the serene hush of the night came the distant hooting of owls—a weird, mysterious sound which seemed to give the finishing-touch to her mood of emotional excitement.

"Mother of God," she murmured to herself (it was an echo of her childhood, and her nearest approach to devotion), "give me what I want! I want so to be happy!"

The moment after she mocked herself with remorseless contempt. If she did want to be happy, it was only her own skill and daring which would get the victory for her, and the first step in that direction she was now fully prepared to take.

"Did you ever walk to Crawford, Dolly?" she asked, retreating from the window with the sudden apprehension that their voices might be overheard.

"Never! It is a good five miles."

"And how long would that take to walk?"

"I can't say exactly. What have you got in your head, Anna? If you want to go to Crawford, I daresay we can have the pony-carriage to-morrow."

"I want to attend Mass at the Catholic chapel to-morrow morning, at the early celebration. When I say I *want*, my meaning is that I am resolved to go."

Dolly, who was in the act of loosening the shining plaits of her golden hair, suffered her arms to drop sud-

denly to her side; she turned upon her cousin open-mouthed with surprise.

"You! Why, I have heard you make fun of the service scores of times! Why do you want to go? Mamma would never forgive you, Anna."

"But I shall manage in such a way that she will never know. I want you to help me, Dolly. You must go with me—we can easily get out of the drawing-room window."

"But we cannot easily fasten it again! The servant will tell. It is out of the question, Anna. I should be frightened to death. Besides, it is too far to walk; we should have to get up before it was light. It would be quite a disgraceful thing to do, and—what for?"

Anna hesitated a moment; then slowly raising her arms above her head, and suffering them to fall to her sides again with a singular but expressive movement habitual to her moods of excitement, she answered clearly:

"I want to speak to Philip Methuen."

"Oh!" was Dolly's response, in an accent of unmistakable reprobation. "I could not do that; it would be dreadfully improper! Besides, Anna, we should be sure to be found out—some one would see us and tell, and I don't know how mamma would punish us. We should be going against her on so many points, we should deserve——"

She stopped short; Anna's look of passionate scorn almost frightened her.

"Do not speak another word, Dolly; you are a miserable little fool! I shall go all the same, only I shall go alone. No, I don't want to hear the sound of your voice again."

"I would do it if I could," said Dolly, helplessly; but Anna vouchsafed no answer.

It was a long time before Dolly sobbed herself to sleep that night. She tried to renew her remonstrances, but her cousin silenced her with almost brutal contempt. Anna herself lay open-eyed through all the long hours of the night, never for a moment swerving from her purpose.

At one time the idea occurred to her that she would so far alter her programme as to lie in wait for Philip nearer his own house—it would save time and fatigue; but the fear of missing him led her to return to her original plan.

If she arrived first at the chapel, she could not possibly fail in her object.

At five o'clock in the morning she got up and looked at the weather. The sun was barely risen, and the heavens were overcast with clouds. Already a few drops of rain had fallen. The outside world looked indescribably chill and depressing: the charm, the allurements of last night were as extinct as if they had never existed. Dolly was asleep, but turning restlessly on her pillow. For a moment Anna's resolution faltered. Then she renewed it with tenfold stringency. Was it not from such a life as now shut her in that she was going to escape?

She made a careful and judicious toilet. There was a chilliness in the air that induced her to put on the faultless dark-gray ulster which Miss Earle had given her as a parting gift, and which, as revealing the grace and admirable symmetry of her person, was the most becoming garment she could have worn. She had a dainty close-fitting hat which matched it, accommodating itself to the massive coils of her hair, to the delicate, finely-cut face, and the magnificent dark eyes, as the last harmonious touch of a perfect picture. It vexed her sense of congruity that she felt constrained to carry an umbrella; but although the rain was not at that moment falling, the skies threatened a downfall.

Just as she was ready to leave the room Dolly opened her eyes. She glanced with a momentary bewilderment at her cousin, and then the remembrance of last night rushed back on her mind. In a moment she had sprung out of bed and seized Anna's hand.

"Oh, Anna, do not go! I beseech you, do not go!"

Anna's only answer was a contemptuous gesture of repulsion.

"Then wait a few minutes," said Dolly, pushing back the cloud of fair hair from her face, and looking up at her cousin with a sort of martyr resolution, "wait, and I will go with you!"

"You will not go with me, for there is no time to wait; besides, you could not walk so fast as I. I will go alone. You can please yourself about betraying me."

She turned and went out of the room.

There was no difficulty about getting out of the house. Anna walked straight into the drawing-room, guiding her way carefully so as to make no noise in the imper-

fect light, opened the shutter of the window against which she had been leaning during Dr. Farquhar's yesterday's visit—it seemed longer ago than that—and let herself out into the garden.

The garden-gate was never locked. There was a bolt easy enough to withdraw, and in a few minutes more Anna was walking swiftly on the high-road to Crawford.

Her first sensation, in spite of her high spirit, was one of extreme nervousness. Since she had been grown up—rather since she had been in England—she had never been out of doors so early before. There was something foreign and unaccustomed in the aspect of things—the world seemed still asleep. Her own footsteps were almost the only sound she heard, except the flutter and twitter of the uprousing birds and the plaintive bleat of some sheep in the fields which she skirted. After a time she encountered farm-laborers at intervals, trudging heavily along the roads to their respective labor, with no more elasticity in their gait or vitality in their faces than when they had exchanged “good-night” at sundown yesterday, with any passing stranger. Sleep had revived their physical forces enough for the weary round of the day's work, but allowed of no reserve of energy for any human function beyond mere physical sensation. Now and again some man, younger and more alert than his fellows, stared hard at Anna, with a confused sense of pleasure and then of surprise; but beyond standing still to look after her for a moment, he gave no sign and offered no interruption.

It was otherwise, however, when she drew near the town.

Crawford was the seat of a thriving local industry, and flocks of men and girls were wending their way to the different mills, not with the bovine docility of the agricultural laborer, but with coarse laughter, gross jest, and a good deal of indiscriminate horse-play.

Some of the women intentionally jostled her in passing—all had their keen criticisms to make on her dress and appearance; and the men, or boys rather, offered her compliments that brought the blood to her cheek. Anna had the spirit of a lioness, but not even a lioness fights against stupendous odds; and besides, it was a necessity to escape observation. She glided through the crowd as swiftly and silently as a shadow, with every pulse at fever-heat, and darting covert looks around.

Carshalton Street, in which the chapel stood, was one of the lowest thoroughfares in the town, and of the worst reputation, though naturally the girl was unacquainted with the fact. She saw, however, with her quick inclusive glance, that several spinning-ways opened direct upon the sidewalk, and that knots of frowsy, unkempt women, and rough, brutalized-looking men were standing together in the way she must go before she could reach the little building at the extreme end of the street.

Involuntarily she made a little pause to reconsider her position, and at the same moment she was aware of a swift, firm step behind her, a light touch upon her shoulder, and turning almost with the impetus of light, she found herself face to face with Philip Methuen.

Thought and emotion have also the velocity of light, and the strongest currents of feeling may ebb and flow within limits inapproachable to time and space. It was perhaps scarcely within a moment's interval that Philip Methuen and Anna Trevelyan, thus strangely met after more than three years' separation, looked at each other in silence, but it was long enough for the one to imbibe a draught of sensation which permeated every nerve and fibre of her being with a rapture akin to intoxication; and for the other to perceive that the girl he had left behind him was grown into the most perfectly beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Anna!" he exclaimed. "I need not ask if you are well; but what is the meaning of this? So far from home—alone—and in such a part of the town as this! It is well I am here to take care of you."

She laughed with pleasure, deliciously conscious of a new life in the light of his countenance, and still holding the hand he had naturally extended in a grasp of the tenacity of which he was scarcely aware.

"It is well!" she answered, in her own, melodious voice. "Oh, Philip, how glad I am to see you! and—how splendid you have grown!"

He colored a little, but her delight and ardor were so spontaneous, he had not the heart to check her; his feeling was how much of the impulsive child she still retained. At the same time he was keenly aware of the observation they were attracting, and drawing her hand through his arm, led her gently along the street.

Anna, on whom few external things were lost, ob-

served that the women drew back with a sudden air of decent reserve, and that some of the men touched their caps to him; also that he seemed to recognize faces on all sides. He did not say much to her till they had entered the chapel enclosure. It still wanted a few minutes to the hour of service; a few worshippers had already assembled—there were not likely to be many; and the priest was at that moment crossing over from his house, which closely adjoined the chapel. He lived and labored zealously in the midst of his unsavory flock.

Philip, who had placed Anna within the shelter of the porch, stepped across to speak to him.

"I have Father Price's permission to make use of the vestry for a few minutes, while you explain how it is I have found you here," he said to her when he came back. "Please follow me."

She followed him, as a matter of necessity, into the small whitewashed chamber, which held nothing beyond a table and a chair, and an old oaken chest clamped with iron, which was the depository of the district registers. A dingy surplice hung from a nail in the wall, and a bottle of water and glass were set upon the table. The one redeeming point of beauty was an ivory crucifix of mediæval workmanship, which was suspended above the chest.

Philip placed the chair for her, and pouring some of the water into the glass, offered it to her to drink.

"You are right," she said, accepting it eagerly, "I am worn out with excitement and fatigue. I have walked all the way from Sheffington Vicarage."

"So I judged; but why, Anna? I do not wish to hurry you, but I have not much time at my disposal. What has led you to do this thing?"

"What? Cannot you suppose it is to worship as you worship? But no—I won't deceive you—that was not my motive. On those subjects I feel just the same as ever—as my father taught me to feel. I came, because I could think of no other way of meeting you."

"I am distressed," he answered, "that you should have been driven to such an expedient, and that circumstances have made it impossible for me to come and see you. But I relied upon Mrs. Sylvestre explaining her own objections, and I looked forward from time to time to the chance of meeting you at Earlescourt. For the rest, you know pretty well how my time is spent just now."

"What do you mean about Mrs. Sylvestre? Also—I have another wrong to put right—why did you not meet me at the station when I came home? I thought it would have been enough for me to express a wish."

"It might have been enough," he answered, with an indefinable reserve of manner which irritated her to the highest point, "had my time been at my own disposal. I had occasion to see Mrs. Sylvestre the same morning I received your letter, and I begged her to explain how impossible it was for me to do as you wished. My uncle was at that time very ill indeed. Her answer was, that under no circumstances would she have sanctioned such an arrangement, and she made it a personal request that I should not visit you at the vicarage. Is it possible she did not explain this?"

"She explained nothing," said Anna, in a low tone.

"Then it is very generous on your part to have forgiven what must have appeared to you such shameful neglect; and I am deeply grateful, Anna, though I could wish you had proved it at less cost to yourself."

He spoke with more warmth, and his eyes rested upon her with a sort of tender admiration.

"How beautiful you have grown, little Anna!" and he lifted her hand to his lips; "and Honor and Oliver tell me how clever and accomplished as well! You have proved the truth of what we once talked about—the wheels run more smoothly, and you are willing to own now that life is worth living?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him with eyes full of tears; "I am willing to own it now."

Her heart was full to overflow. The tones of his voice, the remembered individualities of his manner, the physical beauty which wrought at all times upon her sensuous temperament, swayed her with irresistible force. She could scarcely resist the impulse to cast herself upon his breast, or to sink at his feet sobbing out her passion and her joy; but time and training had done something for her in the way of self-discipline, and also she did not feel secure one moment against interruption.

It was an unwelcome shock to her excited sensibility when he said more coolly: "Will you sit and rest here for a few minutes while I go into the chapel? Then we will get a carriage of some kind from the 'Bull' to take you home."

"But you mean to come with me?"

"No, that is out of the question. Mrs. Sylvestre will regard your conduct, I hope, as a characteristic stroke of impulse; or, if you think I can do any good, I will try, if possible, to call at the vicarage before the day is over; there is a long day yet before us."

He smiled, seemed to take her angry silence for consent, and opening the door which led into the chapel, went out.

Anna clasped her hands before her eyes.

Was this casual meeting—these guarded, kindly words—this infinite gulf of distance—to be the only outcome of her perilous freak?

Oh, but he was priest-trained, and under bondage still; she would not risk her future by too great precipitation. One thing, however, would be necessary: to restore her relations with Earlescourt, so as to obtain the opportunity of occasional intercourse with him. She would throw herself upon Honor's generosity, and ask if she was to be cut off from her love because she had not been able to love Adrian back again?

Philip returned, after a short interval, accompanied, to her angry displeasure, by the old priest, who greeted Anna with almost paternal kindness, and began to talk to her about the village of Skeffington, and the changes she had known in his time. After a few more minutes, the messenger who had been sent for the carriage came in to announce its arrival at the door of the chapel, and bringing with him at the same time a cup and frothing jug of new milk.

"Come, Anna," said Philip, as he filled the cup and offered it to her, "this reminds me of the old days at Fiesole—you were never so content as when feeding me with goat's milk."

"Let me feed you now!" she said eagerly. "I will not drink unless you share it with me."

It was perhaps as well that in the rush of memory his words excited, she had slipped back into the softness of the Tuscan tongue. She held out the cup her lips had tasted as she spoke; but he put it down on the table beside him without responding to her tender challenge, and with a deliberate avoidance of the glance which he knew was fastened upon his face.

"Let me put you in the carriage at once," he said,

with a smile which, in spite of its sweetness, had a suggestion of restraint in it; "it is quite time that both of us were at home."

"Will you not drive back too?" she asked, as she took her place.

"I am not ready. I prefer to walk. *Addio, a river-derci!*"

CHAPTER XX.

"If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only, that evermore
Thou mayst love on through all eternity."

—E. B. BROWNING.

"PUT out the lights and draw up the blinds, so that I can watch the dawn, and persuade myself the night is further spent than it is. I shall weary you all out! It frets me that I should make such a long business of dying."

"And I have not courage enough to face the idea of the time when that business will be done!"

"Oh, that eases my mind! I have been thinking, as I lay awake, that no man could well be more solitary than you when I am dead. I don't know of any man, woman, or child who can claim relationship with you. You must marry, Philip, and give me your promise that you will—it is in the bond."

The young man was silent, and it was too dark to see his face.

"It vexed me greatly," pursued Sir Giles, "that you made yourself the guest of the Abbé de Sève during that week in Paris. What better way could you have taken to put yourself in touch with the old denials? To my thinking, it was treating me unfairly. I repeat, you stand pledged to maintain the race: you are twenty-eight years old, nephew."

There was again a pause between them, and Philip perceived that Sir Giles had turned toward him as well as his weakness allowed, and was peering through the semi-darkness to see the effect of his words. He moved his chair close to the bedside, and took hold of the hand that was straying over the coverlet with the restlessness of pain and weakness.

"I see that it will comfort you," he said, with his habitual directness of speech, "if I tell you that my reluctance to marry is a thing of the past—that is, if I am happy enough to persuade Honor Aylmer to be my wife."

"Honor Aylmer!" repeated the old baronet, with a gasp of emotion. "Heaven is kinder to me than I deserve! You have lifted a load from my heart—Honor is not too good for you."

"My prayer is that she may be willing to think so."

"You will go and ask her the question to-morrow—that is, to-day—Philip! Tell her from me, a dying old man, that she must forego her privileges—that I must see your hands joined before I go. What should hinder it?"

His excitement was raising dangerously high; the consolation he had never expected to receive seemed suddenly close within his touch, and he was eager to grasp it.

"Promise," he cried sharply, "that there shall be no delays or reserves on your part, and that you will do all a lover can to overrule hers."

"I promise," said Philip; and there was something in the inflection of his voice which satisfied his uncle. He fell back on his pillows with a sigh of relief.

"Send Duncan to take your place, and go to bed for an hour or two. Do not go to her heavy-eyed and pale. Yet—wait a minute!"

It was characteristic, that his morbid sensibility was quickly reasserting itself, and checked the full tide of his comfort.

"It is human nature, but I should hardly have thought it was yours, Philip, to have fallen in love in such a time as this. You have managed to indemnify yourself pretty well for the tedium of waiting on an old man's death-bed. I do not complain, but the fact strikes me."

"My love for Honor Aylmer is not the growth of the last month or two. I took it to India with me, and I still keep my secret. I don't mean to deny that we have never met or parted lately without a deeper conviction on my part that my happiness lay in her hands—but this without any breach of loyalty to you."

"So be it," said the old man, still with impatience; "let it pass! Anyway, now you have the satisfaction of knowing that your love and your loyalty run on the same lines. Don't keep me in suspense an hour longer than necessary!"

There are perhaps few things more difficult than for a man to make deliberately an avowal of love; it seems to be of the essence of the passion that such disclosures should be accidental and spontaneous. Perhaps as Philip Methuen, later on the same morning rode slowly toward Earlescourt with this purpose in view, he felt such awkwardness less than most men would have done. The long training of his youth had tended to chasten, almost to eliminate, the impulsive propensities, and to reduce every action of his life to some recognized law of conduct.

It would indeed need to be some terrible crisis of experience when either his words or actions escaped his own control, or hurried him into the vortex of self-abandonment; but it should be remembered that this mastery is never obtained by any man the bases of whose character are not deeply laid in strength of feeling as well as strength of will. Thus it followed that even his love for Honor should be modified by the potent influences of his education, as well as by the bias of his nature: whether right or wrong, he held the opinion that even in legitimate forms of self-gratification there is, not perhaps positive unworthiness, but a descent from the highest plane of human conduct. To live to himself was so far from being an *allurement*, that it almost needed an effort to accept this charmed life which seemed opening before him—not from coldness or lack of receptivity, but from the temper which instinctively disclaims the right to personal happiness.

“Soul, take thine ease!” he said to himself, half bitterly, would be the burden of the message the future bore him, if Honor’s sweet eyes answered the love in his; self-indulgence, self-delights, the highest sensual pleasures masking themselves as duties, instead of the relentless sacrifice of individual will and desire—the rigor of unshrinking subserviency—to other men’s needs.

As he got off his horse and entered the house, he distinguished the sound of Oliver’s piano under Honor’s crisp and delicate touch. He was sufficiently at home to find his way to the room without introduction. Oliver was lying on the couch under the window, which stood open to the warm perfumed air. A magnolia tree in blossom pushed its lustrous leaves close against the glass.

He looked flushed and worn, and the lines on his brow indicated not only some special pressure of pain and

discomfort, but of intense impatience and resistance under it.

"Oh," he cried, as Philip entered, "is it you? Leave off, Honor—Philip is better! I begin to hate Chopin as he does. Presently he shall sing to me."

He made room for Methuen to sit beside him, and frowned and twisted with irritation when he saw him cross over to the piano to speak to Honor.

"Bear with him," she said, in a low tone; "he has had one of his worst nights, and is worn out with pain. Your influence is greater than mine; how are we to give him strength to suffer?"

Her look and manner were that of one whose sympathy has been strained to the verge of endurance, and there was a pathetic droop in the lips, and a heaviness in the eyes she raised to his face, that suggested the idea to his mind that Oliver's sleepless night had not been endured alone. Pity and tenderness, and the instinctive worship of his soul for such unconscious virtue as hers, quickened his love almost to the point of pain; it took the color from his cheek and gave fire to his glance, but no more overt sign escaped him.

"I can stay with him for an hour," he answered—and the sacrifice taxed him more heavily than he would have believed possible—"if you will rest meanwhile, and give me the opportunity of speaking to you before I leave the house."

He dropped his eyes as he spoke; he did not choose to read his sentence in advance. For a moment Honor's heart stood still: the man who spoke to her was the ideal of all charm and excellence to her pure and exacting mind, and—there could not be much mistake as to what his words and manner meant. It meant, that she should spend the given hour of rest in questioning her own worthiness to receive the great gift of his love.

When Methuen had closed the door after her, he turned back to Oliver, and was struck by the expression of his face—the suffering and bitterness were so intense. It had been in his mind to expostulate with him on his unmanly want of patience and consideration, but pity conquered every other feeling. "I see," he said, "your pain is almost past bearing. What can I do? It seems a cruel mockery to say I wish I could bear it for you."

"You!" cried Oliver, turning fiercely upon him—"you! What do you know of aches and pains? I am insulted

by your pity! It is an infamy that one human being should be born into the world like you and another like me—a mark only for the contemptuous compassion one throws to a thrashed hound or overdriven horse! What was hard enough to bear as a boy, I find out is unbearable as a man. Do not stay here; go where you wish to go—to Honor, who is waiting for you! Am I blind, do you think, as well as lame and crooked?”

“I grant,” said Philip quietly, sitting down beside him in spite of his resistance, “that if you accept your hard fate in a spirit far meaner than that of a beaten hound, you lower yourself even beneath that level—you to whom some of the highest chances of humanity have been offered.”

The boy uttered a disdainful snort.

“It is nothing but a truism to tell you that the perfect equilibrium of body and mind, the energy of the strong, the success of those called great, even the happiness of happy lovers, count for nothing in the divine estimate; while one sigh of impatience checked, or sharp stroke of pain endured without betrayal, knits the soul to God.”

Oliver glanced at him askance.

“I should hate you, Methuen, only—you believe what you say. The justice of God, then, puts martyrdom for my portion, and every good gift of body and mind, and all the human bliss that goes with them, for yours; and I am to accept it as an equitable arrangement?”

“What true soldier resents the call to the front? It is he who is placed in the rear, among the reserves which may never be wanted, who may well doubt his courage and merit.” Philip stopped short suddenly; his teaching seemed to have a sharp personal application.

“Pity you should not be able to change places with me!” said Oliver, in a tone of derision. “If there is one thing to my mind more disgusting than another, it is to see the man who treads softly on rose-leaves indicating the red-hot ploughshares to the appointed victim, and bidding him take heart of grace. Martyrdom never commends itself to the martyr, depend upon it. I like the reverse!”

He leaned forward and peered into the other's face, which he had turned away.

“Why don't you tell me you would have preferred my lot in life to yours?” he asked, with a sneer.

"Because I could not say it honestly; the strength to submit and endure only comes with the necessity."

He got up and went to the piano. "I will sing to you, if you like."

"Ah, well, that will be a minor martyrdom," said the boy spitefully. "You shall sing till I am tired—only, if you have been sitting up all night, I am afraid you will not be in good voice, and I am critical, if nothing else."

Philip accepted the challenge—his blood was on fire. Every pulse seemed to rebel against this forced suspense and quiescence; but was he to prove unequal to this trifling test with his own brave words in his ears?

Oliver did his best to make the test well-nigh intolerable. He interrupted and contradicted him continually—asking for what he knew he did not sing, and finding fault with what he did, with a mixed perversity and acuteness difficult to bear; but Philip's patience and coolness were invincible.

Oliver was first tired out—or rather a spirit like his, which hung upon musical expression as upon a golden chain, lifting him out of the abyss of physical sensation, could not resist the spell of the exquisite voice, touched to the finest faculty of interpretation.

"Forgive me," he said humbly, as Methuen for the third time reached the conclusion of a certain movement of Purcell's, in which the boy had lost himself in rapture, "forgive me, and I will let you off! Come here a minute!"

Philip went close up to him, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"When you have taken Honor Aylmer away from me, Philip Methuen, what good shall my life do me? And yet I cannot hate you."

"If," was the answer, "I am so happy as you seem to expect, I will never take her away from you; our home shall be yours. And now let me go and find her."

But as he went downstairs toward the garden, where he seemed to know by instinct she would be, Miss Earle interposed with friendly greetings and inquiries, and polite acknowledgments of his kindness to Oliver.

"We miss Adrian so much," she said. "He was always good to his brother, and lightened Honor's labors a little. You have not heard from him lately, I suppose?"

"No, I have not heard from him. I thought he was at Kenmure with Sir Walter."

"Oh, no, he has never been with his father at all; he has gone off on some raid of his own."

She looked at Philip curiously, wondering how much he knew of the situation, and if it was to his account that her nephew owed his recent disappointment, and the rest of the family their profound satisfaction.

"You are not going, I hope? Surely our forlorn condition will move you to pity, and you will be persuaded to stay to luncheon. Sir Giles, I judge from your looks, is better this morning?"

"He is not better—it is a certain though slow decline—but he gave me leave of absence. No invalid could be less selfish."

"Then you are not in a hurry, and I will put a shawl over my shoulders and show you my rose-garden. We have quite a second harvest."

Philip submitted with the grace of a courtier, and the practised patience which was seldom unequal to the demands made upon it; but Miss Earle was disappointed in her companion. Her impression was "that he knew something about roses," as she expressed it, and recognized their importance in the scheme of the universe; but after he had miscalled "*Maréchal Valliant*" for "*Xavier Olibo*," and failed to perceive that he had never beheld so perfect a specimen of "*Prince Camille de Rohan*" before, her interest slackened, and she remembered she had letters to write.

"I think you will find Honor in the nuttery," she said. "It is a favorite retreat of hers, and if you can spare the time, a chat with you will do her good. Tell her I depend upon seeing you at luncheon."

She nodded and turned away, and he was at last free to follow his bent.

The nuttery was in a far-away corner of the grounds—a somewhat wild and neglected stretch of shrubbery with filbert-trees of so considerable an antiquity that they might well have been mistaken for trees of the forest, and the more so that they had long ceased to bear fruit. It was a whim of Sir Walter Earle's not to have them cut down. On the right hand the space was marked out by a wall covered with mosses and lichens of exquisite gradations of golden color, and with tiny hart's tongue ferns peeping out from every chink of vantage.

A straight grass-covered path, soft as velvet, and with its verdant pile almost as closely cut, led to a wide rustic bench covered with an awning, on which Philip could perceive that Honor was seated. Above shone the blue-gray August sky, palpitating with light and heat.

Honor rose instinctively as Philip drew near.

"Don't let my coming disturb you," he said. "Sit down again, Honor; with your leave I should like to talk to you here."

His eyes dwelt upon her with a tenderness not to be mistaken; but for a few minutes he did not speak.

"You wore a white gown like this and a sash of the same color the first time I saw you—do you remember? Ever since I have judged all women's costumes by that."

"I remember perfectly. You read aloud that passage from Dante beginning '*Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli*' you condemned Chopin, criticised my painting, and took Oliver's liking by storm."

"Does your memory also recall that I stopped at that time a whole month at Earlescourt? That month was to me a new revelation. It was very soon after I left Paris, and was my first experience of family home-life. I had never lived under the same roof with any woman before (except my mother), and was quite ignorant of the danger I ran. Honor, forgive me if I seem to speak too abruptly. I have no knowledge how other lovers plead; but you set before me in your sweet unconscious daily life the qualities I had been taught to reverence and adore from a child, in such a fashion that I could not at first distinguish between my religion and my love."

He paused a moment, but she did not speak. Her inward answer was, "What am I, to be held thus worthy?" He went on:

"When I discovered what had happened to me, it was to know that I was guilty, if not of a crime, at least of a shameful weakness. I went to India to try and forget the betrothed wife of Adrian Earle."

Then she looked up at him with a smile touching her lips, and all the light of a woman's tenderness shining in her eyes.

"You are not going to tell me that you succeeded?" she asked.

"I succeeded so far," he answered, "that even now at this moment, if he or any other man could make you

happier than I, my acquiescence would be absolute. I have been content to forego you, Honor—what stronger proof of love can I give?”

He had taken her hands in his. The inflections of his voice, to which she had been keenly susceptible from the first hour that they met, and the proud humility of his manner, so wrought upon her that it was difficult not to make her response too swift and eager. She turned away her face as she answered:

“I am afraid! Your notions are so high—you are so different from other men. You think me so much better than I am, and will be disappointed when you discover your mistake.”

“Ah, I need to retaliate all that; but it is not to the point. I love you, Honor, once and forever. Come what may in life, no other love will touch me. Can you love me back? I will worship you next to God!”

“Can I?” she replied, involuntarily tightening her clasp upon the hands which held hers. “I believe I have always loved you, Philip; just as Anna Trevelyan opened Adrian’s eyes to the knowledge of his mistake, so, though I did not know it at the time, did you open mine. But, I repeat, I am afraid of my great happiness.”

“Trust me,” he said; “I will not deceive you. Outside my duty to God, I am yours body and soul, flesh and spirit, as long as I draw the breath of life or can discern the evil from the good.”

He drew her into his arms, and their lips met, not with the intemperate heat of passion, which exhausts the honey of union as the bee the flower, but with the nobler reticence of the highest love, which by a divine paradox attracts while it withholds.

Before Philip left Honor that morning (he did not accept Miss Earle’s invitation to luncheon), he had won from her the promise that she would come and see Sir Giles Methuen on the next, knowing how it would cheer and gladden the sick man to see her and hear her himself. He had as yet said nothing about his uncle’s anxiety for an immediate marriage, for there seemed to him something almost sacrilegious in such haste. Perhaps he was scarcely anxious to forego the finer rapture and more spiritual delight of the lover for the assured content of marriage, or he was reluctant to startle Honor too suddenly from the tender contemplation of her rose of joy.

It was also agreed upon between them that though it was necessary to ask at once Miss Earle's approval and consent, they should keep their golden secret a little longer from public disclosure, Oliver being made the only exception.

CHAPTER XXI.

"The darkness of death is like the evening twilight; it makes all objects appear more lovely to the dying."—RICHTER.

How at every turn in the road of life men have to reconcile themselves to renewed and irremediable disappointment!

When Honor Aylmer, accompanied by Miss Earle, arrived late in the afternoon of the next day at Methuen Place, Mrs. Gibson met them with red eyes and speech scarcely under command.

Sir Giles was adored by all his dependents, to the surprise of some of his friends; but where large-hearted generosity exists in conjunction with rigid requirements as to essentials, and indulgence toward details, added to quick discernment of fidelity or the reverse, servants are sure to be loyal in spite of flaws in the master's temper. There is nothing that less wins their favor than a slack, uncertain, unobservant rule.

She told them, as well as she was able, that Sir Giles had been sinking rapidly during the last twenty-four hours, and that the symptoms now present were those which they had been warned would precede dissolution. He had become suddenly worse soon after Mr. Methuen had left the house the day before, and was almost speechless on his return. Since then he had rallied a little, and had insisted on having his old servants summoned to his bedside to bid them farewell, and was now in the very act of receiving the last offices of the Church, both Fathers Price and Francis being in attendance.

She added, "he was in a heavenly frame of mind"—a statement which drew a doubtful smile from Miss Earle's stanch Protestantism, and a sigh of indefinable desire from Honor.

The two ladies exchanged looks of hesitation and sympathy, and then the elder said:

"I think, if you see no objection, we should like to wait a little while, in case of change or improvement in poor Sir Giles; no one need know that we are here."

The housekeeper showed them into a sitting-room, and lingered a little longer at Miss Earle's request.

"Mr. Methuen, no doubt, feels it very deeply?" she asked. "He will be left very much alone in the world."

"It would be a strange thing if Mr. Methuen did not feel it," was Mrs. Gibson's almost indignant rejoinder, "for Sir Giles took to him from the first more like a father than anything else. The thing he feels most now is parting from him; it would go to any one's heart to see the way he lies in bed and watches him, and his voice has a different sound when he speaks to him after another. But there, what can you expect? Who could help loving Mr. Methuen out of the common? There isn't a stable-boy about the place who doesn't do the best he knows to please him; and if Sir Giles has treated him like a father, no son could have gone beyond him in duty."

"I agree," said Miss Earle, briskly; "very few young men watch month after month in a father's sick-room as Mr. Methuen has done. He must be very much worn out."

"You would think so, but he doesn't show it. Some people have a way of soon knocking themselves up with nursing and calling out for pity instead of the patient, just because they neglect all reasonable ways of taking care of their health. Now, Mr. Methuen goes out for a good walk every day, and takes his meals regular; but for all that, there are not many hours in the twenty-four when he is out of Sir Giles' room, and that's hard upon a young man when all's said and done."

At this moment a bell rang from the upper portion of the house. Mrs. Gibson turned a little pale.

"It's the dear master's bell," she said. "Excuse me a few minutes, ladies."

"Only," said Honor, catching her hand, "come back and tell us, or send."

They waited a few moments in painful suspense; at least it was acutely painful to Honor. Miss Earle could not help letting her eye wander over the furniture of the room in which they were sitting, and speculating upon the radical changes that would be necessary before Methuen Place could be made ready for its new mistress.

She condemned herself for the involuntary callousness, but could not feel any profound emotion at the passing away of a feeble, querulous old man, who had no ties upon her regard.

Then the door unexpectedly opened, and Philip himself entered.

His face was so pale, and his manner so intensely quiet and controlled, that Miss Earle felt a little startled.

"I am sure," he said, addressing her first, "you will excuse all ceremony. My uncle is dying; he knows you are here, and he has asked to see Honor. Have I your permission to take her to him?" Then he added quickly, "You know what that consent means?"

"Take her—if you will," was Miss Earle's answer, and her voice was scarcely under her control.

"Come, Honor!" he said, and he took her hand and led her out of the room.

The sick man, over whose eyes the films of death were already gathering, looked eagerly toward the door as it opened. Mrs. Gibson was sobbing at the foot of the bed, and the two priests knelt one on either side.

"Leave us for a few moments alone," said Philip, addressing the elder of the two; "I will summon you again immediately."

Father Price retired at once, not without a kindly glance at the tall beautiful girl whose hand Philip still retained, but the other (the same who had slept at his watch over poor Mark Methuen's remains) made some slight protest.

"Suffer it to be so now," urged Philip, with an anxious glance toward the bed; "let the responsibility rest with me."

"The responsibility of calling back a parting soul fresh from the consecration of his Maker is a heavy one, my son, and not to be lightly assumed," said the old priest, in a tone as devoid of sensibility as sounding brass; but he could not resist the decision of the young man's manner, and reluctantly followed his brother into the ante-room.

Philip led Honor up to Sir Giles Methuen's right hand, and the girl sank reverently on her knees beside the bed, and fixed her tender suffused eyes upon the ashen face.

"I am here," she said, in low tones of exquisite pathos; "give me your blessing."

Sir Giles with a concentrated effort fixed his failing

eyes on her sweet face, and a faint smile trembled on his lips.

Philip, anticipating the purpose he had no strength to express, knelt beside Honor, and taking her hand in his, put it solemnly against his lips.

"We are pledged to each other for life or death," he said, "and it will soften our sorrow to know that you are satisfied."

Sir Giles succeeded in raising his hand and putting it on the clasped hands of the pair kneeling beside him. Then a few words ebbed slowly from his lips.

"Be good to him, my dear," speaking to Honor, "and pay him back for me."

His eyes wandered to his nephew and a sudden spasm passed over his face. Human heartstrings of necessity break and let go, but they bleed under the process, and there was a look of such poignant anguish in the gaze that met his, that it added a bitter sweetness to the final pangs.

His lips moved again, but utterance was over; and had it been otherwise, no words could have been adequate to express the yearning love and wistful hope which were the last conscious moments of the old man's spirit on this side the undiscovered country.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion having my best judgment choler'd,
Assays to lead the way."

—SHAKSPEARE.

It was a subject of some surprise and general remark that the death of Sir Giles Methuen seemed to be so profoundly mourned by his nephew. Not that there was any demonstrativeness in Philip's grief; it had the depth, sincerity, and strength which were the elements of his character.

For the six weeks following the funeral he shut himself up in the gray old Place, making it to be distinctly understood that he neither visited nor received visits. It was a foreign custom by no means acceptable to English notions, and Miss Earle's dissatisfaction almost ap-

proached resentment, for no exception was made in favor of Earlescourt.

"You are satisfied with your lover, Honor?" she asked dryly. "He is certainly not made for working days."

"I am quite satisfied," she answered, and her sweet face had that marvellous radiance with which happy love transfigures the countenances of some women. "He writes to me every day."

Miss Earle shrugged her shoulders. "Let us be thankful for small mercies! I feel bound to warn you, dear Honor, against taking too obviously the attitude of worshipper; it is a temptation which corrupts even the virtue of an archangel, and I suppose that Sir Philip Methuen himself does not stand higher than that. Somehow my mind misgives me—I have always held paragons in fear."

"You mean—that you do not trust Philip?" Honor smiled with a superb assurance.

"Not exactly that; but I can hardly believe that we can have a commonplace wedding, a refurbishing of tarnished splendors, and prosaic bliss afterward, when he is the hero! You know the Methuen motto and legend—'*Fides non felicitas*'—and that ill-luck is the inheritance of every heir to the title? But forgive me, darling; I am only jesting in order to keep your ideal expectations within reasonable bounds."

It was true that Honor was looking both grave and pale.

"I cannot conceive what could come between us but death," she said. "Together there would be nothing to fear."

"And that 'together' will not be very long delayed, sweet," kissing her tenderly. "I admire the common-sense of poor Sir Giles, who laid that injunction on his nephew; and at bottom, perhaps, I admire the self-denial of the nephew himself. Let us say that he loves you, dear, almost as well as you deserve."

The singular seclusion observed by the new baronet was equally a subject of discussion at Skeffington Vicarage. It would have been a matter of astonishment to any one unacquainted with the craving hunger after personal details which seems the normal condition of country society, and is only to be paralleled by the mysterious sagacity with which it scents them out, how every

movement of young Methuen was watched and known. How often the family solicitors visited him—whether Mr. Chapman stayed all night or otherwise—every occasion when the old priest at Crawford was his guest, or he walked himself to the chapel for early celebration,—were circumstances as well known to his neighbors as himself.

Anna Trevelyan, from the time when he came almost as a child to the vicarage, had been in the habit of bribing her aunt's housemaid, Janet, for news of the doing at Methuen Place, increasing her bribes with the difficulty or necessity of obtaining it. The fact of the girl having a brother in the stables of the house established a natural line of communication, and was prized by Anna as an inestimable piece of good fortune. In this way she was kept pretty well informed of his visits to Earlescourt, and had even known of that paid by Miss Earle and Honor to Sir Giles Methuen on the day of his death.

This circumstance quickened to an almost intolerable degree the latent jealousy and misgiving she had always entertained in respect to Honor Aylmer, and she began again eagerly to revolve schemes for placing herself in direct communication with Philip. The obstacle which had stood between their intercourse was surely now removed by the death of the selfish old man (there are none so keen to detect selfishness as those whose motive-power it is), who had monopolized the time and affection of his nephew. What was there now to prevent the recognition and fulfilment of the contract which, she never ceased to try and persuade herself, dated back to her childhood—his excessive scruples about visiting at a house where he had been forbidden; the failure of his expectation of meeting her at Earlescourt to which he had referred; his exaggerated respect for his uncle's memory, and monkish way of showing it?"

She never concealed from herself that her regard for Philip Methuen was a much more active and powerful sentiment than his for her, and that it would be part of the function of her love to kindle the flame of passion from her own torch; but she accepted the necessity as the natural outcome of his priestly training, and the prospect of breaking down the barriers of his coldness and reserve rather stimulated her imagination than otherwise.

But this was only so long as he was equally indifferent to all other women: the notion of his feeling any attrac-

tion toward Honor Aylmer beyond the moral complacency he had often expressed, and which moved Anna's unmitigated contempt, worked so powerfully against her peace of mind that the routine of her aunt's household became daily a burden heavier to bear.

The one mitigating circumstance was the seclusion which Philip thought proper to observe, and which, she had kept herself informed, was not violated by any intercourse with the Earlescourt family.

Anna had succeeded in keeping her visit to the Roman Catholic chapel a secret from her aunt. On the day in question she had dismissed her carriage at a discreet distance from the vicarage, and had then walked quietly into Mrs. Sylvestre's presence with the announcement that she had been taking a walk before breakfast in hopes of getting rid of a headache, which, she added, "is so bad that I shall never be able to boast immunity again."

So well had her diplomacy succeeded, that she had thought it better to get a note conveyed to Methuen Place, through the usual channel of communication, telling Philip not to come to the vicarage as he had promised, the matter being arranged without his interference.

Such was the condition of affairs about five weeks after the death of Sir Giles, when the vicar, coming in as usual one afternoon from his parish rounds, said, as he took his place at the tea-table, invariably spread and surrounded at the same hour:

"I forgot to mention that I met Mrs. Gibson in the park yesterday—a very worthy creature, my dear, is Mrs. Gibson—and learned some news of the new baronet."

Mrs. Sylvestre instinctively bridled: the commendation of the stanch old papist housekeeper would certainly have been met by protest or disclaimer, only she was not unwilling to hear what had been communicated, and deemed interruption unseasonable.

"You will be surprised to hear," pursued Mr. Sylvestre, examining with some natural disappointment the contents of an almost exhausted tin of sardines, "that Mrs. Gibson has been in town for the last ten days engaged in choosing and furnishing some bachelor chambers for Sir Philip Methuen."

"I am not in the least surprised," interrupted Mrs. Sylvestre, severely; "I am quite prepared to see the young

man indemnify himself for the unnatural restrictions of his youth by running a course of profligate self-indulgence in the future. It is simply the effect of a cause; and, I ask, what is there to restrain him in a religion formulated to accommodate itself to the worst weaknesses of human nature?"

"I don't think, my dear," replied the vicar, a little dryly, "that the young man in question will draw very heavily on his spiritual privileges. It appears that Lord Sainsbury is expected home in wretched health, which of course we already knew from the newspapers, and has telegraphed to young Methuen to meet him in town. There is some press-work to be got out of hand which was intrusted to him when he left India, and must see the light before Parliament meets. Let us hope that this will help to keep him out of mischief."

"In that case it would have been more reasonable for Philip Methuen to take up his abode under Lord Sainsbury's own roof."

Mrs. Sylvestre spoke with that air of finality which is never more influential than when we are arranging our neighbor's affairs.

"Lord Sainsbury only stops in town a few days, and then goes on at once to some warmer climate. His town-house is not open; he will go to Claridge's, but Methuen prefers a domicile of his own. His work will keep him in town some time, it appears—not a cheerful prospect at this time of the year."

It was Anna's policy never to betray the interest she felt in this subject to her aunt. The news she had just heard was absolutely unacceptable, baffling her plans, and rendering her course of conduct more difficult than ever; but she ate her dry toast, and sipped her milk (which was the diet she preferred), with her habitual air of indifference to whatever subject was under discussion.

Inwardly she blessed the minuteness of her aunt's curiosity when Mrs. Sylvestre asked:

"And where are Philip Methuen's apartments?"

"In Bruton Street, I think she said, and that he was going up to town in a day or two. One thing is certain, he will not be much missed! It can never be sufficiently deplored that Skeffington parish is in the hands of a Catholic proprietor. I hear it reported that the new baronet means to restore the home chapel at the Place,

and bring over a chaplain from some foreign seminary; but I trust his friends at Earlescourt will advise him against doing anything so unpopular."

"His friends at Earlescourt or elsewhere will never influence Philip Methuen much," replied Mrs. Sylvestre with a sneer; and then she added, moved by the association of ideas, "I cannot understand, Anna, how it is that the Earle family have seemingly dropped your acquaintance since you returned from town; there is more in it, I begin to suspect, than you choose to explain."

In spite of herself Anna felt the hot blood rise in her cheeks, and was aware that every one at the table looked at her. Mrs. Sylvestre compressed her thin lips with an ominous change of countenance, and began to talk laboriously of something else; but when the meal was over, she called Anna into the drawing-room—a room rarely used when the family were alone, but always made the scene of important discussion or of the administration of parental law.

"I have sent for you," she said, "to ask you once more—as I have often asked you before, only this time I mean to have an answer—the reason why you cut short your visit to the Earles in London, and of their casting you off since their return?"

She spoke with the quiet incisiveness which, as Anna expressed it, meant mischief; and the girl was quick to perceive that another occasion had arisen for a mutual trial of strength. Would it suit her purpose best to defy her aunt or to yield?

"I was tired of them," she answered sullenly; "I wanted to come home."

"You are not apt to be soon tired of a life of luxurious indolence, and of opportunities for the indulgence of your love of pleasure and personal display; your excuses lack ingenuity, Anna. Try again!"

The sneer wrought upon Anna. Her eyes flashed.

"Have the truth if you will," she said with a gesture of defiance; "I came home because Adrian Earle made love to me."

Daring as she was, she felt startled by the change in her aunt's face; the color ebbed from cheeks and lips, and a cold gleam of sinister meaning came into her eyes. She looked as if she had received a blow; and it was true that she had—one, the force of which she was only able to estimate by degrees.

"Do you mean," she asked, in a low suppressed voice, "that Adrian Earle made you an offer of marriage?"

"What else could I mean? To what other end was he likely to make love to me?"

"And you refused him?"

"I refused him," repeated Anna.

There was a pause. It would be hard to convey the idea of the rage and disappointment in Mrs. Sylvestre's mind. Here had been a solution of the problem as to the final disposal of her niece, beyond her wildest expectations and desires; so much indeed beyond the latter and the girl's deserts, that it would have been thoroughly obnoxious to her except for the incalculable advantages such a position would have won for her own children; and Anna, with a perverseness beyond calculation, prompted by an almost inconceivable malice, had thrown her chance away!

"And this is why you come home? You complain of your life here, and the burden of poverty and dependence, and you had the offer of becoming mistress of Earles-court, and—refused it! I do not believe you."

Anna shrugged her shoulders with an air of ineffable indifference. In Mrs. Sylvestre's mood of irritation it was more than she could bear; her accustomed self-control escaped her, and she grasped the girl's arm with passionate violence.

"Or if," she resumed in a hissing whisper, "if it be true, there is some shameful explanation of the fact. What is it? You would not be Lewis Trevelyan's daughter if, sooner or later, you failed to disgrace the name!"

Anna wrenched herself away from her aunt's grasp with a face white and distorted with anger. Mrs. Sylvestre had put her finger on the most sensitive spot in the girl's heart: her whole being was in revolt.

"Mother of God!" she cried, and she raised her hand as if in invocation, while her face flamed with the white heat of her passion. "I will never forgive you! If I live for ever and ever, I will never forgive you!" And she turned and fled from the room.

Where should she go? What should she do? She was beside herself with rage and indignation—the insult to her father's memory scorched her brain like fire. Oh, that she had some friend at hand who would receive her, so that she might never taste the ignominy of sleeping or breaking bread under that miserable roof again!

And then came another turn of thought. Had she not a friend—the man who had stood by her dead father's side, and renewed in that awful presence the pledges he had so often given before? Who had said, "My child, I love you dearly—love me a little! I will take care of you as long as I live."

He was not yet gone to London. She could go to him, and tell him the hour was come beyond postponement when he must make good his words. His days of forced mourning were over; it remained for her to bring back warmth and joy into his desolation.

This was the first impulse of her mood of outrage and excitement, but as her passion exhausted itself, certain whispers of prudence and common-sense made themselves heard. It was now the middle of October, and daylight was already gone; there was neither moon nor stars, and the wind was rising. How could she, alone and at such an hour, demand admission at Methuen Place of the sleek, self-important, inquisitive servants who must answer her summons at the door? There was no means at this season of the year of stealing admission into the house as she had done before. Moreover, might not Mrs. Sylvestre, finding she had escaped in her desperation, follow her to the one only asylum where her desperation could take refuge?

No; if she were wise, and would succeed in compassing the end she had in view, she must delay her appeal to Philip Methuen till the next day: it would be easy to make it appear she was the bearer of some message from the vicarage; or, in the wholesome light of day, what necessity to consider appearances at all? She should at once pass that and all other anxieties into his hands.

For the remainder of the evening she kept her room, and was allowed to keep it—a circumstance which Anna readily translated into a proof that Mrs. Sylvestre recognized and probably regretted her intemperance, which conclusion increased her contempt without softening her resentment. She appeared, as a matter of precaution, at the breakfast-table the next morning, pale, sullen, and taciturn; but this behavior also appeared to be condoned—her aunt at least, whom she avoided looking at, making no comment.

Mr. Sylvestre looked somewhat sharply toward her, his wife's tolerance naturally reducing his own.

"What is wrong with Anna this morning?" he asked.

"She looks as if she had not slept all night, or had got out of bed on the wrong side this morning."

These homely phrases transported Anna with mingled disdain and indignation; her lip curled, her sensitive nostril dilated, and she straightened her neck with an air of imperial scorn. The vicar's eyes lingered upon the picture almost involuntarily.

"What a splendid creature it is!" he said to himself. "I devoutly wish she were safe in some good man's keeping!"

After breakfast Anna again retired to her room, meaning to take the first opportunity of escaping unobserved from the house; but circumstances helped her scheme. She had not been long there when Dorothy came in.

"Mamma wants me to take a message to Mrs. Mitchel at once," she said. "It's a little vexing! I have not got that new chant perfect, and meant to practise it this morning."

"What is the message?" asked Anna indifferently. "Is there any answer wanted?"

"No; only to say mamma is willing to give Mr. Mitchel ten shillings for the silver-spangled Hambro' cock. She objected at first, as being too much. I think it *is* too much."

"I will go," said Anna. "The vicar is right. I look, fit for nothing this morning; a walk will do me good."

A quarter of an hour later she was walking leisurely across the vicarage garden; leisurely through the long straggling village, where every eye that fell upon her knew her, till she reached the gate that led into Methuen Park. During this period of forced repression her excitement was growing fast—so fast that she refused to stop and answer the questions which pressed on heart and brain.

What was she doing? What should she say when she and Philip Methuen stood face to face? She would not give ear even for a moment to the rising whispers of womanly pride and modesty; she turned scornfully upon her struggling shames and hesitations, as pusillanimous and out of place. What should she say—would speech be needful? Would not her first glance challenge his manhood and quicken the slow blood in his veins? Would not a hint be enough to make him understand that she appealed to him in this extremity as her pledged knight—that she had flung off the protection of her aunt, whose

cruelty had culminated in that last brutal insult, on the strength of her belief that a dearer and more secure asylum waited her so soon as she saw fit to claim it? Still, was not the fact that she needed to reassure herself after this fashion a proof of the extremity of her situation?

Anna stood still for a moment, and leaned against the trunk of one of the huge elm trees. Since she had entered the park she had walked so rapidly as to be already out of breath, and the conflict of her mind was still more exhausting. She drew a deep breath, and tried to settle and order her mind.

It was a lowering, chilly, autumnal day: the gorgeous splendor of the kindled foliage had already faded, the crimson and gold had changed into sickly orange and brown, and the leaves, saturated with moisture, hung limp and dishevelled from the boughs. The occasional caw of a rook from one of the more distant plantations was the only sound which broke the dull silence of the thick oppressive atmosphere: the stream flowed so sluggishly, she could scarcely detect the movement of the water, and its pleasant tinkle was dumb. The only figure in view was that of a boy threading the public road which crossed the park, with a heavy basket of bread upon his back, under which he seemed to labor and groan, shifting the burden continually from one shoulder to another. The girl was conscious of a feeling of impatient disgust as she marked his uncouth face and figure, and ungainly gait.

She could distinguish the chimneys of the house where she stood, and observed how little a way the smoke rose in the heavy air. She moved slowly a few paces nearer, and the old gray mansion lay at her feet, dumb, too, as it seemed to her. Every window was closed, and the blinds drawn in all the principal rooms facing the gardens.

A feeling of sickening disappointment, or rather of blind impotent fury as against some fate that mocked her, put new life into her limbs. A few moments more she had pulled the bell at the heavy gateway, and heard the sound reverberating through the house. An interval elapsed, brief indeed, but almost intolerable to her impatience, before the door was somewhat slowly opened, and Austin, the old butler, faced her in the wide issue.

"Is Sir Philip Methuen at home? I have a message from my uncle, the vicar of Skeffington."

Whatever the inward sinking of her heart, her bearing was as stately and defiant as usual, and her beauty of that rare and perfect type which carries its message to high and low alike; also, as a matter of necessity, the man was personally acquainted with her.

"I am very sorry, miss. Sir Philip started for town about half an hour ago; but perhaps you will come in and speak to Mrs. Gibson?"

Anna walked into the house like one in a dream, and sat down on the first chair that offered in the room into which Austin showed her. Her feelings seemed for a time in a state of collapse. Gone! It did not in the least appear to her what she could do next, only instinct told her she must not let the keen-witted old housekeeper guess at her state of mind. When Mrs. Gibson came in, stiff and reserved as her manner was to strangers, and especially so to any member of the Sylvestre family, to say nothing of her quick sense of the obvious breach of propriety the vicar of Skeffington was committing in making his beautiful niece his messenger to the young master of the house, Anna rose from her seat resolute and on guard. The expression of the good woman's face was at once a challenge and a warning.

"Sir Philip Methuen is gone to town already, I hear," she said with perfect aplomb. "That is a pity! My uncle had an important commission he thought he would be good enough to undertake. I am a good walker, Mrs. Gibson, and offered to bring the message myself."

"It is a written message of course, Miss Trevelyan? In that case, I can enclose it by to-day's post to the master."

For a moment Anna felt herself at fault; but in proportion to the inward difficulty was the steadfastness of the watch she kept on Mrs. Gibson's face.

"Oh no, it was not written!" she answered. "It was about some book the vicar wanted, and I was quite able to explain. You seem to forget that I have known your master ever since I was a tiny child: he taught me to read!"

"He is not at home, at all events, Miss Trevelyan," replied Mrs. Gibson, without any relenting of the lines of her face. "Mr. Sylvestre must ask his favor by letter. I see no objection to giving you Sir Philip Methuen's address."

She turned aside to a writing-table as she spoke, so that the sudden change in Anna's face was lost upon her—a change arising from the swift perception that to obtain his precise address was to place a new weapon in her hands.

As Mrs. Gibson handed her the slip of paper, she added, with an air of evident reluctance: "I do not know whether Mr. Sylvestre may think his business important enough to take him to Trichester on the chance of meeting Sir Philip; he does not go up to town till the afternoon express."

Perhaps few greater triumphs of self-control have been gained than was won by Anna Trevelyan on receiving this information without betrayal; that the pallor of her skin flushed a little, and the light in her eyes concentrated and darkened, were signs too delicate to be read by Mrs. Gibson, who had just removed her spectacles after having accomplished her little effort at penmanship.

"I will tell my uncle what you say," she answered—and there was a metallic ring in the habitually deep, melodious voice—"and he will of course do as he thinks proper. No, thank you, I don't require any refreshment."

A few minutes more and she was in the open air again, free to breathe, and think, and plan, with the quiet unheeding sky above, and the unbroken solitude of the park all around. She walked away from the house mechanically, and in the homeward direction—for might not there be curious eyes watching her?—but when she had reached a certain turn in the path where she knew herself to be beyond observation, she stood still, took off the hat which weighed on her forehead, and passed her hand over her eyes and brow, as if to wipe away the sensations which oppressed her.

She was in that mood of mind when the human heart cries upon God—upon the Power around and outside us, to help the reason that is consciously tottering, and scatter the darkness which, if left to thicken, means despair.

She knew, as well as if she had seen him, that the man in whom her passionate life was bound up was at Earles-court, unable to leave home without bidding Honor Aylmer farewell, and—she could not bear it!

So much was it true that she could not bear it, that

her mind, with the instinct of self-preservation, instantly seized upon alleviations of the idea. They at Earles-court were his neighbors and best friends, and courtesy required that he should take leave of them. His kindness to Oliver Earle was of the kind he showed to all stricken and miserable creatures, and would be sure to lead him to go and see the youth before he went away. Sir Walter and Adrian might have suddenly returned. As for Honor, did she not know that his regard for her was of the sedate, ethical kind which might mean friendship, but not love? No, not love!

And at that very moment the man and girl of whom she was thinking were standing together, hand locked in hand, her head upon his shoulder, his kisses upon her lips, and only no speech between them, because love has a finer medium of interpretation, and defies words to bear the burden of its joy.

"Come into the garden," he had said to her; "I can bear it better in the open air!"

Bear it—the rapture of reunion, the pain of parting, brief as it was to be. "A week hence I shall be home again, Honor, to ask you formally of Sir Walter Earle, and announce our engagement, and then"—his face kindled as he bent over her—"sweet, you will remember I have loved you for years with every breath I drew, and that my dear uncle's pain in death was lessened by his belief in your goodness. How soon will you consent to come to me?"

But this was what Anna could not see or hear even in the hush of the solemn autumnal morning. Would it have made any difference had she been able?

There was one way still open—she could avail herself of the chance of meeting him at the station. She cared nothing for consequences if her scheme miscarried, and if it succeeded, the care of the future would lie with him.

Eight miles divided her from the county town; but she was vigorous enough to think lightly of the distance, and to walk there would help to pass the tedious hours away, besides the difficulty of finding any other way of getting to Trichester. Vehicles had to be hired from Crawford or Trichester itself, and were not to be picked up at any intermediate point.

So Anna retraced her steps through the park, though at the farthest practicable distance from the house, and set her face steadily to her purpose.

On consulting her watch, she found she had no time to lose. It was then nearly twelve o'clock, and the express was timed to leave Trichester at three.

The road was an uninteresting beaten highway, without a single point of interest to her; the free expanse of downs on either hand looked dreary enough under the brooding skies, and at no time commended themselves to the warm Italian instincts of the girl. She was much more fatigued than she expected to be when she at length entered the town, and saw by the huge clock of the parish church that only twenty minutes remained before the departure of the train.

She had always been accustomed to look upon Trichester as dead and lifeless to the last degree; but to-day it seemed to her strangely full of stir and bustle, and that every passer-by looked at her in spite of the effort she made to assume a brisk and business-like demeanor. She made her way at once to the station, where, to her vexation, she perceived the station-master already on the watch for the express. He recognized her and touched his cap. The refreshment-room was on a very meagre scale at Trichester; yet it could at any rate have furnished Anna with a glass of milk and a biscuit, of which she stood sorely in need, but she dared not ask for them for fear of attracting attention and remark.

"I am waiting to see a friend off to town," she explained haughtily enough to the station-master, whose silent observation as he passed her was becoming unbearable. Indeed she felt increasingly that the whole situation was becoming unbearable. The hands of the clock pointed to five minutes of the hour. A fair sprinkling of passengers had already gathered on the platform, where each was in full view of the other.

What chance of speaking to Philip Methuen in a few breathless seconds, before the impertinent observation of outsiders? Would he not be astonished and displeased at the step she had taken? Was it not imperative to secure privacy enough for explanation before she ventured to show herself to him? How could this be done now? Still less, how could she go back to her shame and her misery without doing it? What explanation of her protracted absence could she give that would satisfy Mrs. Sylvestre's vigilance?

The train was sharply signalled; the commotion quickened a little.

"Hold hard, Bill!" cried one of the porters. "There's one of the Earlescourt carriages coming along like mad. It will take all they know to catch the train!"

Anna looked, and read the explanation at a glance. He had lingered too long over his adieus, and taken the Earles' carriage, because their horses were better than his own. Was she, after all, deceiving her own soul, or was it rather in his mind to deceive her? Her blood tingled in her veins. Was she of the temper to submit to treachery without protest—to stand aside, superseded without a struggle for her rights? Come what might, she would put his honor to the question.

Her hand shook as she opened her purse. She had money enough for her ticket to town, but not much over.

"Open the carriage door, and get me my ticket," she said to a porter standing close by her side.

"Where for, miss?" asked the man, touching his cap.

"Waterloo," whispered the girl, shrinking back into a corner of the carriage with bated courage and failing strength, for she had scarcely eaten anything that day, and dreaded nothing so much as that any eye should recognize her.

At the moment the man placed her ticket in her hand, she saw Philip come on the platform. He was walking rapidly toward the already opened carriage, with the Earlescourt footman following with his portmanteau, and the little station-master trotting almost obsequiously beside him, and laughing at his success in catching the train. He was dressed in deep mourning, but there was no mourning in his face. He looked in full vigor of body and mind, assured master of himself at all points, and of the blessedness which warmed his heart and touched his lips with a new sweetness, and his eyes with a direct and masculine light.

To the girl who watched him furtively, he looked like the beautiful youth who had played about with her at the old farm at Fiesole—the pledged friend of her girlhood and the redresser of her wrongs—the man whom no other woman should take from her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ And she said,
Not to be with you, not to see your face—
Alas for me then, my good days are done !”

—TENNYSON.

BEFORE they had reached Salisbury the rain fell in torrents. This was the first pause on the line; and at this point Anna's carriage, which she had hitherto had to herself, was invaded by a party of travellers, consisting of mother, nurse, and three children.

The girl had not only no love for children, but they were positively disagreeable to her; and although the year-old baby sat passive and wide-eyed on its nurse's lap, and the two pretty little fellows, in their picturesque sailor suits, only offended by their infantile chatter and eagerness to see what little was to be discerned in the fast-growing darkness from both windows of the carriage at once, their presence and light-heartedness were almost more than she could endure in her condition of nervous tension. Of Methuen she saw nothing; and the nearer they approached the capital, the greater became her passionate anxiety. The train had only made one other stoppage (at Vauxhall) between Salisbury and Waterloo, and by the time it reached the terminus night had fallen in effect, though it was only seven o'clock; and the special aspect of ugliness and disrepute which belongs to that station was aggravated by the condition of the weather.

Anna sprang out of her carriage almost before safety warranted. Her state of mind was by this time such that all doubt and diffidence were lost in what she felt was the extremity of her situation. Her claim upon Philip Methuen's protection had taken a form it was impossible for any man to resist.

For the first few moments she did not see him—that is, she failed to discover him among the men who were leaving the first-class carriages, and none of the occupants of which, she was convinced, could have stirred from their seats before she had done. Also, she had marked the position of the carriage he had occupied with her usual precision; but for those first few minutes she

refused to accept the evidence of her senses. It was not till the train, which had been a short one, had discharged all its passengers, and was being promptly shunted off the line, that the iron fully entered into her soul. He was not there. Probably he had got out at Vauxhall; and she was alone and friendless in London, almost without money, or even money's worth—for Anna's disdain of ornaments led to her seldom wearing any of the costly trinkets she possessed—and with her hope dead within her breast.

The train had emptied itself so rapidly that there had scarcely been time for her appearance to attract attention, and her fellow-travellers were close behind her. She heard the clear, shrill voice of one of the boys in eager exclamation: "Papa! I see papa! Remember I was the first to find him out!" She hated him for the rapture which brought home more acutely to her soul the sense of her own despair. At the same moment a porter civilly accosted her with the usual formula as to luggage and cab.

"I have no luggage, but I want a cab—not a hansom."

The girl offered him a shilling as she stepped into the unsavory recesses of the four-wheeler, with a grim sense of the discrepancy between her liberality and her purse: there is a sort of ghastly humor which walks side by side with some moods of desperation.

"Tell him Bruton Street, No. 17," she said to the porter, who was still officiously hanging about the cab-door. What else could she say?

During the short transit Anna sat erect, defying her fate. The stakes for which she was playing were so tremendous that to lose courage or faculty of resource meant ruin—ruin for such as she was! Involuntarily she raised her beautiful head with the old gesture of superb assurance. She was weak because she was faint with hunger, and it would be wise to renew her strength before fighting the battle that lay before her. She stopped the cab before the door of a pastry-cook's shop they were passing.

"Wait ten minutes," she said to the driver, with as cool and haughty a gaze into the man's face as if she had been at ease in an assured position. "You need not be uneasy—I will pay you well."

She went in and satisfied her hunger with some soup and bread, but the latter seemed to choke her. Appetite

was in abeyance, though exhaustion had made itself felt. She returned to the cab less invigorated than she had hoped. The rain was still falling; the lamps reflected their shadows on the wet, gleaming pavements; the dripping unfurled umbrellas of the tide of pedestrians—a tide which never ebbs—added to the oppressed and unpicturesque aspect of the streets. London looked squalid to her eyes—not like the same city as it had appeared to her, rolling through its West-end thoroughfares in one of the Earles' well-appointed carriages.

Another brief interval, and the cab stopped before the house in Bruton Street; the cabman descended, and came round for instructions.

"Knock and inquire if Sir Philip Methuen is arrived," said Anna, pronouncing the name with deliberate distinctness.

The man obeyed, and after a moment or two, evidently spent in colloquy with the woman who had opened the door to him, came back with a negative.

"There is some mistake," she said in answer; "ask the mistress of the house to come out and speak to me—or wait, I will get out myself."

She walked through the still open doorway of the house, and confronted the woman who stood waiting in the hall, with an air at once modest and assured, and with a skilful avoidance of the light of the lamp from falling at once upon the beauty of her face.

"This is the house, No. 17," she asked, "where my aunt, Mrs. Gibson, has taken apartments for Sir Philip Methuen? He will not be here for a day or two possibly—he is gone to Claridge's Hotel to meet a friend from India, and I have been sent with a list of things to make his rooms more comfortable and homelike."

The woman looked at her steadily.

"And how am I to know, miss, that you are Mrs. Gibson's niece? It is not the right time of day for a respectable young woman to come to a strange house on business of that sort."

"No indeed!" said Anna, suffering her voice to fall a little. "I was afraid how it would strike you, and have been fretting about it as I came along in the cab. But Methuen Place is eight miles from Trichester, as no doubt Mrs. Gibson would tell you, and I just lost my train and had to wait for the express. My aunt would be in a dreadful state of mind if she knew I was out in the

streets of London alone so late; as we timed it this morning, I ought to have been here at three o'clock at latest. See! she wrote down the address for me last night, for fear it should slip my memory."

The girl produced from her pocket the neatly written slip of paper which the old housekeeper had given her that morning. The landlady glanced at it, and saw her own name and address in the careful, laborious handwriting she immediately recognized as Mrs. Gibson's, from whom she had received several written communications. It was evidence not to be gainsaid, and the simple directness of Anna's manner was difficult to mistrust, in spite of the inevitable suspicion her good looks excited. Also the remarkable plainness of her dress helped the illusion—Anna owed more than she knew to her straight, unflounced skirts. She was quick to detect the advantage gained.

"My aunt said that if I could not get my work done in time to-day, perhaps you would let me have a bed under your roof instead of going to a hotel, which is not nice for a young woman by herself; and then, perhaps, you might be able to go shopping with me to-morrow? It is quite certain now I shall not be able to get my work done to-day." There was a sob in her voice.

London landladies as a class are reported to be lynx-eyed and callous-hearted; and probably they adapt themselves, like other things, to their environment; but there are exceptions. Also Mrs. Baillie was not a little influenced by the fact that she and the old housekeeper from Methuen Place had discovered that they were both west-country women; and although one hailed from Somerset and the other from Dorset, this is held as kinship in the Philistine capital. Moreover, she had a very imperfect idea of Sir Philip Methuen's age and appearance; she had not yet seen him, and Mrs. Gibson was not garrulous.

A few minutes more saw the cabman dismissed—Anna discreetly slipping her last half-crown into Mrs. Baillie's hand for the purpose—and her asylum for the night secured. Just as the cab had turned the corner of the street and disappeared in the darkness, Anna suddenly clasped her hands together with a gesture of distress.

"My bag—my new handbag!" she cried. "I have left it in the cab! What shall I do, Mrs. Baillie? My aunt packed it for me so carefully this morning; and I had

some receipts in it for you for Sir Philip, who is very particular about what he eats. She will never forgive me!"

She burst into tears, and sobbed hysterically: it was a safety-valve for her excitement of which she eagerly availed herself, for such passionate overflow was a necessity of her nature; and the violence and genuineness of her grief made a final conquest of Mrs. Baillie's motherly heart. For the rest of the evening all was plain sailing; Anna was treated as guest and equal, and accommodated herself to circumstances with admirable facility, entertaining Mrs. Baillie with anecdotes of the Methuen family, which removed the last lingering doubts from her mind; and then, well fed, well warmed, and elated by success, she was conducted at night to a comfortable little bedchamber adjoining that of her hostess.

She had supposed that excitement would have prevented her from sleeping, but youth and fatigue were too strong for her, and her eyes closed almost as soon as her head was laid on the pillow.

The next morning brought a note from Methuen to Mrs. Baillie, to Anna's thankful relief, from Claridge's Hotel, saying that he would take possession of his rooms in the course of the day, and would rely upon finding everything in readiness. This note put the good woman into a considerable flutter; the terms on which she had let her rooms had been so advantageous, and Mrs. Gibson's injunctions and personal painstaking had been so solicitous, that she held her new tenant in anxious respect.

"Look round the rooms yourself, my dear," she said to Anna, "and you will be able to see if they are all right. What a pity the list you spoke of was in the bag! Don't you remember some of the things Mrs. Gibson mentioned?"

Anna rapidly enumerated certain articles—an easy-chair of a particular description, a reading-lamp of some special construction—but added she would prefer to wait now till she had heard again from her aunt.

She professed to have written to Mrs. Gibson that morning, telling of her misadventures, and excusing herself accordingly, and had, indeed, read the letter to the sympathizing Mrs. Baillie, and had taken it for better safety to the post herself, where, it need not be said, it was never deposited.

As the day wore on, Anna's excitement grew almost beyond her control, and she welcomed it as a priceless relief when Mrs. Baillie announced her intention of going out for an hour for commissariat purposes, saying that it was a comfort to leave some one in the house to look after the little maid. "There was no knowing what mischief they did when left to themselves; she might even go pulling things about in Sir Philip Methuen's own rooms!"

To those rooms Anna now betook herself. The sitting-room fronted the street; she would be able to hear a cab stop and the street door open and shut. She sat down in a chair placed in a dark corner, and began her passionate watch. "I think," she said to herself, as she bowed her aching forehead upon her burning hands, "that I shall go mad if he does not come soon! I feel as if I could not take up this farce again."

She forced herself, by mere dint of will, to sit quite motionless for a quarter of an hour, timing it by the chimes of a neighboring church clock. But it was reserved for her to hear all the remaining hours of the day chimed from the church steeple, before Philip Methuen arrived; and when at length he came, it was so late at night that the girl had been obliged to retire to her room unable to play her part any longer.

Mrs. Baillie came in to speak to her before she went to bed, and Anna was quick to observe a change in her manner.

"I had no notion he was such a young and handsome gentleman!" she said; and there was unmistakable suspicion in the glance she cast at Anna. But Anna was already undressed, and ready for bed; what mattered the landlady's loss of confidence? She could not turn her out of doors that night, and to-morrow—to-morrow would vindicate her position for all time.

That night was added to the short list of Anna Trevelyan's 'vigils; she lay awake in a half-delirious trance of anticipation, her brain suggesting, almost realizing, the incidents so soon to be lived in reality. The phantom bliss which had eluded her so long was to be grasped—to-morrow!

She would claim her own, and maintain her claim in face of any obstacle raised by faithlessness on the one side, or feminine artfulness on the other.

She could condone—smiles of passionate tenderness

touched her lips in the darkness, as she asked herself what it was she could not condone to Philip Methuen—but she would never relinquish.

The knowledge of his vicinity so stirred her pulses and warmed the eager blood in her veins, as to make her forced quiescence a physical martyrdom. But at last daylight, as seen dimly in a narrow London street, dawned, and the welcome sounds of life and movement in the house became audible.

Anna's bedroom was at the top of the house, as we have said, close to that occupied by the landlady. Mrs. Baillie came in to speak to her before going downstairs.

"I would rather send you your breakfast up here, Miss Gibson," she said in quite a different tone from the day before, and with a hard look in her eyes; "and you shall go home, if you please, to your aunt by the first train this morning." And she whisked out of the chamber without giving opportunity for reply.

Anna rose at once, conscious that there was no time to lose; for how could she depend upon Methuen's movements?

She dressed herself with elaborate care (as birds preen their feathers), plaiting and arranging her magnificent hair to the best advantage, and proudly comforting herself with the belief, as she studied the reflection of her face in the meagre little looking-glass, that her beauty was of the type which owes little or nothing to the accessories of dress.

She was now in her nineteenth year, tall as Honor was tall, and straight as a young pine-tree, with a certain regal gait and air which seemed to challenge the world at large to offer her anything beyond her rights. The contour of the oval olivet face, with its perceptive forehead and short firm chin, was perfect; and the skin was of so exquisite a texture and tint that the color which it lacked would have seemed a superfluity. This fine pallor aided the effect of the full molded lips, the slightly aquiline nose, the delicate black brows, which overarched eyes that were the crown of her beauty. To look into Anna Trevelyan's eyes was to encounter not only the physical charm of perfect color and form, and the allure-ment which hangs on heavily fringed eyelids, but an expression of such passionate wistfulness as caught the attention of even the most casual observer, and quickened the pulse of interest and admiration.

She wore a blue serge gown, with soft muslin frills at throat and wrist; but the latter had unquestionably lost their freshness. It was not a particularly becoming garb, but it fell into place about the girl's supple waist and noble limbs in folds and lines of harmonious adaptation.

Never had she looked so beautiful in all her life before: there was a suffusion in the lustrous eyes, a softness about the parted lips, through which the fragrant breath came in half-unconscious sighs of intense repression, and a faint flush upon the cheek, which were like an accomplished painter's last touches to a picture held to be perfect before.

She waited till the little maid had brought her the tray containing her breakfast, and had had time to reach the lower regions of the house again. And then, stealing out of the room, she glided quietly downstairs, and put her hand upon the lock of the door of Philip Methuen's sitting-room. If he were not already there—but she hoped much from her knowledge of his early habits—she would wait for him.

He was there; sitting with his back to the door at a side-table covered with papers, which he had evidently just removed from the strong leather case which stood open beside him. At the opening of the door he turned round, and on recognizing Anna Trevelyan, he instinctively rose to his feet.

For a moment he almost seemed to doubt the evidence of his senses: the first flash of thought pointing to the baffling difficulty of her being on the scene at that early hour of the morning, with the home in which he imagined he had left her securely sheltered, more than a hundred miles away. Also, he was fully aware that she had not a single friend in London at this season of the year. Was the woman of the house known to her by some strange twist of circumstance, and had she sought her protection under some exaggerated sense of injury—their meeting under the same roof being one of the inexplicable coincidences of life? All this rose instinctively to the surface of his mind; but at bottom, scarcely recognized or admitted, was a latent apprehension of evil—the cold projected shadow of calamity which chills the spirit with the breath of prophecy.

Anna, who had advanced half-way across the room, with a smile of delicious enjoyment of the situation upon

her lips, and her eyes scanning his face, stopped short suddenly as she read something of its meaning. Beyond the first natural exclamation as he recognized her he had not yet spoken, and he still stood motionless, with his hand resting on the table beside him.

"Have you nothing to say," she asked; "no welcome to give me?" Her tone was a compromise between tenderness and indignation.

"I have nothing to say," he answered, "because I have no words to express my astonishment. What is the meaning of my finding you in this house? Explain, Anna."

"Oh yes, I will explain," she answered, struggling hard to control the passionate pain caused by his cold and peremptory manner, and with wrath gathering in her eyes; "I am in this house because I have no other to go to. My aunt has driven me from hers; the Earles, your chosen friends, have shut their doors against me because I did not choose to take Adrian Earle as my husband. Tell me where a forlorn, unhappy creature as I am should turn for help and comfort, if not to the one friend who is bound to stand by her?"

"I do not in the least understand. What possible connection can subsist between you, Anna Trevelyan, and the woman of this house? Yet it is just conceivable——"

"That there is some link of connection between Mrs. Baillie of Bruton Street and my old life in Florence! That perhaps she is, let us say, my foster-mother herself, or at least kith or kin to her, or to old Assunta of the Lung' Arno!"

The girl spoke with her passion let loose, and the ring of sarcastic scorn in her voice was of concentrated bitterness. "Why do you pretend you do not understand me?" she demanded.

He passed by the imputation as not worthy his attention.

"You mean that I am the friend bound to stand by you? Tell me, Anna, how you knew where to find me, or, knowing it, how even you could have been capable of the madness of seeking me out here? When did you arrive? Where have you spent the night?"

He spoke calmly, but evidently holding himself under strong control, and he looked at the freshness of her face and aspect with an intense scrutiny in which her

passionate sense detected that admiration held not the smallest part.

"I have spent the night here, under this roof, where I spent the night before last also. I knew where to find you, because Mrs. Gibson gave me your address. She gave it to me when I went, mad with misery, to Methuen Place to find you the day you left town. I did not find you—you were gone to Earlescourt; but I followed you to the station and took the same train as you did. Can you picture my situation when I got out at Waterloo, faint with hunger, without money or friends, and found you were not there?"

"And if you had found me there—what then?"

She turned very pale, and the light of her face died out, but not the resolution of it. "I should have put my hand into yours, and told you—what I tell you now—that the time was come to fulfil the pledges you gave to my dear father. They comforted him in death, and have given me courage to live my life until now."

"The pledges which I gave to your father, Anna, have been fully redeemed. It was I who found you a natural asylum in your aunt's house, and who made you known to a family whose friendship has enriched your life. A girl whom Adrian Earle loves talks at random when she speaks of her life as needing courage to endure. The question now to consider is how to ward off the consequences of your present indiscretion, which is more serious than you seem to have the faculty to perceive."

He spoke with perfect decision and collectedness; but that there was a strong undercurrent of excitement was evident enough from the paleness of his face, the dilation of his eyes, and the strenuous grasp of his fingers on the table by which he was still standing. Anna read the signs aright, and the passion of her disappointment broke down the last feeble barrier of her reserve.

"You think I am an impulsive child," she cried, "ignorant of the ways of the world, and risking my reputation without knowing it! I will try and make you understand. What I have done I have done with my eyes open, to give me a stronger claim on what my heart is set. Are you so blind as not to see my meaning? Can you look into my face and need me to tell you the truth? I have loved you, Philip, from a little child—not, I think, as little children love—but with the germ of the feeling which has grown too strong now to be held

down by any womanly shames and hesitations. See, I keep nothing back—my very soul is at your feet; I cannot live my life unless I live it with you.”

She made a movement of passionate deprecation toward him, but he drew back sharply from her extended hands.

“I will not touch you,” she said, with a cry of pain as if he had hurt her; “but if you do not take me in your arms and comfort me, my misery and shame will be greater than I can bear.”

“And that is what I cannot do, though it cuts me to the heart to tell you so. Had I known this sooner—but it would have needed to have been very soon—I might have shaped my life differently—I think I would have been willing to do so. As it is, I have no longer power to direct it—as little power as will——”

He stopped; there was a confused sound of voices outside the room, voices which both he and Anna recognized.

He drew a breath of inward thanksgiving.

“I thank God,” he said solemnly, “your friends are come to reclaim you! Anna——”

It was in his mind to make some appeal on his own behalf to her honor and candor, but the expression of her face as she turned it upon him checked the impulse. He recognized at once that he had a woman’s vengeance as well as a woman’s love to deal with, and that the odds in the coming contest would be heavily against him.

At the same moment Mrs. Baillie opened the door, and announced:

The Rev. Herbert and Mrs. Sylvestre.”

She gave a little shriek as she saw Anna.

“On my soul and honor, madame,” she asseverated, addressing Mrs. Sylvestre, “I did not know she was here! Fie upon them both! The artful hussy; she has deceived me through thick and thin!”

“My good woman,” was the answer, “I have no doubt you are quite innocent of any collusion in this deplorable business. Be so good now as to leave us alone with the young lady and Sir Philip Methuen.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ Oh ! must the cup that holds
The sweetest vintage of the vine of life
Taste bitter at the dregs ? Is there no story,
No legend, no love passage which shall end
Even as the bow which God has bent in heaven,
O'er the sad waste of mortal histories,
Promising respite to the rain of tears.”

—M. ARNOLD.

PERHAPS it would have been difficult for any man to have been placed in a position of more cruel or complex difficulty than Philip Methuen.

To vindicate his own honor was to deepen the condemnation of the girl who was standing before them, erect and fearless but palpitating with emotion, like some beautiful wild animal brought suddenly to bay ; and to fail to do so was to compromise not merely his own happiness, but everything which he held most sacred—above all, the happiness of the sweet woman whom he loved better than life.

He saw as he looked at Mrs. Sylvestre that she was strongly agitated, though doing her best to maintain her usual measured and imperturbable manner, and he met the gaze of her hard blue eyes with one of equal steadfastness, touched by an involuntary sympathy.

She colored, and drew herself up with offended dignity.

“ I think you make a mistake in the object of your compassion, Sir Philip Methuen,” she said. “ I can only congratulate ourselves that, coming upon you unawares, we have sufficient proof of the situation to justify our demanding of you the only reparation in your power. But possibly this unhappy girl is already your wife?”

“ What are the injuries I am expected to repair?” he asked.

Mrs. Sylvestre looked toward her husband. The vicar answered the appeal by an uneasy change of posture from one foot to another, and a nervous rubbing of his forehead with his open palm. When he did speak it was with a considerable measure of hesitation, for there was something in the young man's look and manner which shook the strength of his conviction and anger.

"It sometimes happens," he said, "that an honorable man may feel bound to repair injuries which have been unwittingly afflicted. Mrs. Sylvestre and I are in great distress; our niece is known by all the neighborhood to have gone alone to your house two days ago to seek you, and not finding you there, to have followed you to the station and travelled up to town with you in the same train; to have thence proceeded direct to your lodgings, where she has passed the last two nights, and her aunt and myself find you in each other's company early this morning. I put it to you, as a man of the world, whether in these circumstances there is more than one course open? If, as has been already suggested, she is *not* your wife, you will not mistake me when I say that I do not mean to go back to my parish until I, or some other duly qualified person, have made her such."

Anna, who up to this moment had maintained her attitude of defiance, uncertain what position her aunt and uncle would assume, suffered herself at this point to drop into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. The stricken attitude, the flame of color which dyed the pale cheeks beyond the sheltering fingers, did more to win the good vicar's condonation than any words could have done. She herself had no thought of the effect of the action; her whole soul was hanging on the words which Philip would answer.

"The statement you have just made is quite true, I believe, as regards facts," he said; "but it is equally true that Anna and I have only met within the last half-hour since she left her home."

He looked toward her, but she neither spoke nor stirred.

"Unfortunately assertions of that kind need authentication," interposed Mrs. Sylvestre with a sneer; "and I perceive that even my unhappy niece does not answer your appeal. Even if she had, it would have counted for nothing with me. A woman is scarcely expected to criminate herself."

She stopped a moment, and looked from one to the other with a curious expression.

"You are well matched," she pursued. "A girl who has been brought up to deny God and the divine rule of right and wrong, and you, Philip Methuen, a half-pledged priest, who have masked your real character under ostentatious devotion to a false faith until you had made quite sure of your worldly interests, and sent a credu-

lous old man hoodwinked to the grave! Still, unworthy as Lewis Trevelyan's daughter is, we will save her from the shame which she has courted."

Once more, Philip turned his pale, set face toward Anna, who still sat in the same crouching posture with her head bowed between her hands.

"Have you no instinct of womanhood to defend yourself from imputations such as these," he asked slowly; "even if my honor is of no account to you?"

Then Anna dropped her hands and lifted up her white, despairing face. "What does it matter?" she answered. "Nothing that I can say or do now will wipe out this disgrace. It is quite true that you have deceived me, Philip, whether you meant it or not. If you do not belong to me, I have always believed that you did, and you have betrayed my faith in you and spoiled my life all the same. What do I care as to what becomes of me now?"

Instinctively he put his hand before his eyes; partly to hide the despair which gripped his heartstrings, partly to avoid the malicious smile with which Mrs. Sylvestre continued to gaze at him.

There are some forces so relentless that no man can resist them successfully. Anna, too, watched him for a moment, and then, moved by a new impulse, went close up to her aunt as if to challenge her attention.

"You have always hated me," she said; "but you are not false, and I will tell you the truth. I see he despises me because I have not spoken before, but it will make no difference. It is exactly as he says. I have not seen him since I left your house until just before you arrived. But do you think that even such a girl as I am would have been mad enough to do what I have done if she had not felt sure that the man for whom she risked her reputation wanted her for his wife? I want you to believe this for my dear father's sake. Philip Methuen promised him when he was dying to take care of me as long as he lived; when he was dead he took me in his arms and kissed and comforted me. 'I love you dearly—love me a little,' he said. It seemed to me all that meant one thing only; and I felt so sure of this, that I was content to wait his own time and submit to his ways. So when your treatment drove me out of your house, I came direct to him to claim the home I thought was ready for me—I knew his mourning was over—I believed he cared for me. You see, don't you? What

was there to wait for?" Her voice broke as she ended, and she strained her clasped hands together, as if in the effort to keep down her sobs. Mr. Sylvestre, glancing from her pale troubled face to Philip's, felt his heart harden against him.

"What my niece has just now told us," he said stiffly, "exonerates you from participation in her imprudence, but increases tenfold her claims upon your honor. Give us the assurance we want, and we will withdraw with her to our own hotel until arrangements can be made for the marriage. You will agree with me that it should not be postponed beyond to-morrow."

"It cannot be. I am unable to marry Anna Trevelyan. It sounds cruel and unmanly to say it, but the thing is impossible."

He spoke as a man under torture might be supposed to speak, and his face looked as if it had been cut out of stone.

"I am this girl's natural guardian, Sir Philip Methuen," said the vicar, hotly; "and if you persist in your refusal, I will do my poor best to have your dishonor known through the length and breadth of the county. No other woman shall usurp my niece's place, if words can blast your chances. Do I offer you what is not worth having? Any man might be proud to take what you condemn. It cuts me to the heart to see such a girl rejected."

And then Mrs. Sylvestre's clear, cold voice attacked his ears.

"Let me offer you another consideration," she said. For the sake of our daughters and our own position in Skeffington, it is morally impossible that Anna Trevelyan can ever live under our roof again—she is already a byword in every cottage and farm-house in the parish. Facts are known, Philip Methuen, without their extenuating circumstances—that is, if a girl's indecent passion can be called an extenuation. The question remains. What is to become of her? Separated from her friends, and repudiated by you, she will be a mark for the world's scorn. Even Lewis Trevelyan himself would scarcely be satisfied with such an outcome of your pledges of service."

"I will so provide for her honor and safety that no breath of scandal shall touch her; but, I repeat it, I cannot marry her. My life is not at my own sacrilege, and

such a marriage would be an outrage and a sacrifice far greater than the evil it tried to avert. There are some sacrifices which it would be infamous to make."

"Then," said Mrs. Sylvestre rising, "we will consider the last word is spoken, and will leave her to your tender mercies. It is only under the one condition that we take Anna away with us, and that you tell us is impossible. Pray lose no time in carrying out your programme for re-establishing her good name. I shall be curious to see how it will be done. For our part, we have tried our utmost for her, and—failed."

"My dear," said the vicar nervously, "you cannot, of course, mean exactly what you say. It is out of the question that we can go away and leave Anna here; if she does not come with us, we must at least find her some respectable shelter. Do you suppose she would consent to remain?"

"I would consent," said Anna wearily, "for what would it matter, if I am disgraced already? But Mrs. Baillie would turn me out of doors as soon as you are gone. I do not think she will let Philip Methuen stay here either."

She looked toward him as she pronounced the beloved name, and his aspect so wrought upon her that it produced a sudden revulsion of feeling.

With a cry of distress she cleared the distance between them, and threw herself at his feet.

"Forgive me!"—and the passionate caressing diminutives of her Tuscan tongue flowed from her lips as she clung about his knees—"I did not know my love would break your heart! Mother of God!" she wailed, as he tried to disengage himself from her embrace. "Do you hate me Philip? Ah, you are cruel—you hurt my hands!"

The vicar came forward, with tears in his eyes, to lift her from the floor.

"Have you a man's heart within your breast, and can treat a woman thus?" he demanded sternly, as he put his arms about the girl.

"I do not know," was the answer; and then after a brief pause he added:

"Take her away with you!"

"You mean—this is, I am to understand——"

The vicar paused, wondering if the young man, whose

face expressed nothing but a dumb agony of pain, knew the meaning of what he was saying.

Mrs. Sylvestre showed less forbearance.

"My husband is unwilling that there should be any mistake. If we take Anna Trevelyan away with us at your request, it is on the distinct understanding that you consent to make her your wife—and that with as little delay as possible."

Philip bowed his head mechanically.

"To-morrow? I think the necessary matters could be arranged in time——"

"Not to-morrow, nor next day. I will say Saturday, and make what arrangements you please."

There was a pause of hesitation. Philip looked from the one to the other quickly.

"I give you my word of honor—I will marry Anna Trevelyan on Saturday. Do not consider expense, if money will facilitate matters. Also, leave me your address and communicate with me here—but by letter only."

The vicar still regarded him with anxious attention, but the other had rallied his strength.

"You do not trust me?" he asked, and drawing off a plain signet-ring which Mr. Sylvestre recognized as one habitually worn by the late Sir Giles Methuen, he crossed over to where Anna stood, and slipped it upon her wedding-finger.

"This ring bears the motto of our house," he said; "you may take it as a pledge of my good faith. For the rest, you will not wonder if I ask you to leave me alone, and—give some explanation to the woman of the house."

He had not looked at Anna during this little ceremony; but the girl caught both his hands in her passionate grasp, and covered them with her kisses and her tears.

"Spare us that!" said her aunt sternly, and drew her out of the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Now on the summit of Love's topmost peak
Kiss we and part ; no further can we go:
And better death than we from high to low
Should dwindle, or decline from strong to weak.
. . . . Heaven of my Earth ! one more celestial kiss,
Then down by separate pathways to the vale."

—ALFRED AUSTIN.

"No exile's dream was half so sad,
Nor any angel's sorrow so forlorn."

—M. ARNOLD.

PHILIP METHUEN remained standing as they had left him in the middle of the room until the sound of their voices was silent, and he heard the house door shut upon them. Then he walked deliberately toward a chair, and sat down with the intention of facing his calamity and deciding on his plan of action. But even his strong and disciplined will refused to obey the call. For more than an hour he sat with folded arms and eyes fixed on the ground, as motionless as if life had already left him, and with no other consciousness but of anguish so extreme that it was like the thrust of some relentless sword piercing even to the dividing of the joints and marrow.

There is perhaps one thing harder than the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts—namely, the crucifixion of the divine and the true; and hardest of all is it to know that what we endure we inflict, and that the pang which rends our own soul destroys the happiness of another for whom it is a poor thing to say we would have laid down our life.

There is a spirit of devotion to high and noble causes which commends itself at once to the magnificent chivalry of great natures; but to sacrifice the best for the worst, the good for the evil, the noble for the base, almost exceeds the limits of human endurance, and makes of the martyrdom of saint or patriot a mere pageant and self-gratification.

As the man sat, living in advance the moments that were lying in wait for him, like some wretch extended on the rack and in suspense of the turn of the wheel, the lines of his face hardened, and the fine charm and bloom

of its beauty passed out of it forever. The gentleness which made children confide in him, and the noble sweetness which touched every woman's heart who looked at him, were scorched and consumed in the blast of that terrible furnace: the iron had entered his soul, and was subduing it to its own nature.

Even the stimulus and consolations of religion were denied him. The deed he was about to do was unholy and sacrilegious; what love had made sacred and divine was become infamous and repulsive. The convictions and influences of his priestly training, which had yielded to the solvent of a generous passion, reasserted their old power. He abhorred the idea of marriage with Anna Trevelyan: it was not martyrdom that was demanded of him, but a life of ignominy and degradation, from which God Himself would hide His face.

He was aroused by a knock at the door of his room; it had been repeated before, but he had not heard it. Mrs. Baillie was anxious to know if Sir Philip Methuen would have his breakfast served. The answer was in the negative, through the closed and locked door, and the woman missed, with a feeling of confused surprise, the graciousness of manner which had won her good-will the night before.

Thus recalled to the details of life and business, Methuen's eyes fell on the papers on which he had been employed when Anna Trevelyan had come in, and he remembered that he had been engaged to meet Lord Sainsbury at his hotel by noon that day. It was long past that hour, but he would go; or was it worth while to go? Did the claims of friendship hold? Was duty still to be influential over his maimed and demoralized life? Also, could he give his mind to literary discussion under a fastidious author's exigent demands, and answer the claims of physical pain and sickness, with the knowledge before him that ere the sun set he must stand face to face with Honor Aylmer, and exhibit to her her blessedness torn up by the roots? Well, he could put it to the test.

A few minutes' rapid walking brought him to the hotel. As he entered Lord Sainsbury's room, he perceived such signs of pain and weariness on the worn face as suggested a sleepless night, and perhaps patience exhausted by his own delay, and the instinct of pity slowly stirred within him.

"I am sorry to be so late. I have been unavoidably detained, and have now only an hour at your lordship's service. Will that be enough for what we need to arrange?"

"It will not. I cannot talk within the fetters of an hour. What is wrong, Methuen?"

Lord Sainsbury looked at him fixedly. Then he rose, which cost him an effort, and followed Philip to the window, to which he had turned.

He laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"If there is one man to whom you need not hesitate to speak the truth," he said, "it is surely to him with whom you have gone down almost into the valley of the shadow of death. It is something that has cut very deep, I see. It is scarcely possible, when I remember what you told me last night, that anything can have come between you and the woman you love?"

"It is possible. I have lost her, but through no fault of hers or mine. Ask me no more questions—I cannot answer them."

The tone was hard and unresponsive, and he avoided meeting the eyes which he knew were fixed upon his face.

"Is the misfortune irremediable, and yet so sudden? When we parted yesterday——"

Philip endured the stab without flinching, but his stoicism did not deceive the other; he forbore to go on.

After a few moments' pause, he asked: "There is, then, nothing I can do for you?"

"Yes; treat me as you did yesterday. I am afraid you have not slept well, and I am still of the same opinion about cancelling the last chapter of your book. Why defend a policy which has not been impugned, and which you would pursue again in like circumstances? I read it over once more still more carefully after I left you last night."

Lord Sainsbury could scarcely have given his friend a greater proof of his love and confidence than by accepting the line indicated, and taking up the discussion of his literary and personal affairs at the point where they had been left the day before.

When the hour was up, Methuen rose.

"Your sister joins you this evening, and to-morrow you start for Mentone? My best wishes go with your lordship."

It was all he could say, for the eager eyes which met his were softened almost to tears.

"You are resolved to trust nothing to my friendship, Methuen?"

"Mention the name and address of some priest whom I can trust. I am to be married on Saturday."

The two men looked steadily at each other, and then the elder said, with solemn earnestness: "Is this a righteous solution of the difficulty? Marriage is an indestructible bond."

"I know it; righteousness and I have parted, but—there is no alternative."

"I refuse to believe it; you have not had time enough to deliberate."

"As much time as when a man is called upon to choose between the surrender of his honor and his life. I was going to say I had given up the last; but in some cases one is obliged to part with both—that is mine."

He stopped, and then added, with a supreme effort: "I am not the same man that I was yesterday, and even your sympathy wounds rather than heals. Let me go."

A few hours later he was standing in one of the wide bay-windows of the drawing-room at Earlescourt waiting for Honor Aylmer. He had sent a telegram in advance, asking to see her alone, and giving some hint of misfortune; he dreaded for the blow to fall without any preparation. There were only one or two candles lighted in the stately room; but a large fire scattered warmth and brightness around, giving fantastic effects of fluctuating flame and shadow. The blinds and curtains were still undrawn, and the outlines of the trees and shrubs could be discerned in the faint gleam of the crescent moon.

Philip Methuen stood and gazed out into the darkness, seeing nothing but the projection of his own misery, and that meant, at this moment, the sense of the misery he was about to inflict. He was, as he had been throughout the day, outwardly composed; but this self-repression was so severe and protracted that he dreaded lest his strength should fail him in the moment of uttermost emergency. He would shorten the interview as much as in him lay: instinct and reason combine to make swift the stroke by which we save our honor and slay a life dearer than our own.

He heard the door open, and felt that Honor had en-

tered the room; but it was a moment before he had courage enough to turn round. She came toward him quickly, with eyes raised to meet his own, full of tenderness and trust, and both hands extended. In the presence of calamity, womanly shynesses and reserves were out of place. She wore a soft silk gown of the mellow tint of old ivory, and the ends of the sash round her waist were deeply embroidered and fringed with gold thread. There was a distinction in the simple yet beautiful costume, which suited well with the sweet dignity of her tall and lithe figure, and the loveliness of the face eager to discover and greet her lover.

Philip, after a moment's hesitation, came forward and met her in the middle of the room, taking both her outstretched hands in his. They looked into each other's faces without speaking; but every trace of color ebbed from Honor's cheeks and lips as she read the awful sorrow of his gaze.

"Tell me what has happened," she whispered, almost in the tone we adopt in the chamber of death. "I can conceive of no misfortune that can part us—say it is not that!"

"It is that, or it would not be misfortune."

And then, in compassion to the agony of suspense she forbore, for his sake, to express, but which he read in every line of her drooping face and figure, he forced himself to say, still holding her hands firmly in his:

"I have broken the bond between us, and pledged myself to marry—Anna Trevelyan."

He had been about to add on Saturday, but reflection came in time to enable him to spare her this additional blow.

Honor uttered a low suppressed cry. Incredible as the announcement might have appeared to some, it reached her ears with something of the effect of a dim foreboding realized. One flash of backward thought helped her comprehension, although it only served to add intensity to her distress. The flight of Anna Trevelyan from her home was a fact known far and wide. But even in the first moment of sharp endurance her instinctive feeling was less that of self-pity than of passionate sympathy. The expression that met Philip's sombre and concentrated gaze was once of such abounding tenderness and compassion that it went near to break down his fortitude.

He dropped her hands, and turned from her to avoid what he could not endure.

Honor's instinct was to follow him, but she forbore, and said, standing where he had left her:

"Tell me everything that it is necessary for me to know, and trust my love to bear it. I am made for calamity, Philip. Besides, if this be so, what is my pain to yours?"

"Your pain," he repeated, "your pain! It is that which will haunt me night and day, and turn endurance itself into an infamy. Have mercy upon me, Honor! Anger and reproaches would be less cruel——"

"Then I will reproach you; were there no means of escape?"

But as she asked the question—it was so charged with misery—her voice broke, and the sound of her weeping reached his ears. He had dreaded her tears as the one thing his courage would not be able to sustain, and in effect the moment held within it the very bitterness of death. Suddenly turning toward her, he snatched her into his arms and strained her against his breast, with a passion which left her faint and breathless.

"My God!" he said. "Can I forego? We are pledged to each other by ties which it is impiety to break. Honor, I am not yet hers; must I do this accursed thing? Forbid it, and I am bound to obey."

She saw his terrible suffering, and postponed hers by an instinct of her nature.

"Let me judge," she said, softly; "and tell me everything, that I may judge."

He obeyed her touch mechanically, and sat down on a couch beside her, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands covering his face. His voiceless despair pierced her soul; and when after a time he lifted up his head and looked at her, there was that in his changed aspect alone which carried with it a weight of woe. Seldom have a few hours worked more havoc in a human face. The lines and curves which had gone to produce the expression of assured serenity and sweetness had disappeared; the brow had taken the deep vertical furrow of intolerable pain; the eyes seemed to scorch where they fell, and the mouth was hard and set. A sudden flash of memory recalled him to her as she had seen him four years ago at the foot of the Earles-court staircase, when he had suggested Spenser's Chris-

tian knight to her mind, and the contrast brought with it a pang of agony. He had been grave and in trouble then; but that was a sorrow which purged and ennobled, having the divine element of renunciation in it—this the grip of an irremediable wrong, which degrades while it tortures.

“Let me hold your hand,” he said, “that I may feel if you shrink from me. I am not guilty, I suppose, but I have all the shame and pain of guilt.”

And then, in direct abrupt phrases, he told his burning story, without extenuation and without reproach; and as Honor listened to details which were the knell of her own happiness, her passion of love and sympathy quickened, and she strained the hand which held hers against her heart.

When he had done, he said: “It is an insult to ask you whether I was right or wrong. You trusted me with your happiness, and I have betrayed you. It is a poor excuse that it was under such cruel pressure as turns the victim on the rack into a liar and a perjurer.”

He looked down upon the pale, tender, noble face raised toward his own, and it needed all the strength of the consideration that the symptoms of his own distress aggravated hers, to enable him to suppress a groan of anguish. He put her gently from him, and, rising abruptly, turned again to the unsheltered window.

“I will go now,” he said, after a pause. “I have dealt my blow, and have no power of healing. In the future it will be well that we should never meet.”

“Never meet!” she repeated. “You take away my last hope. To have helped you in your misery would have been some mitigation of mine.”

“You could not have helped me,” he answered sternly. “Every time I saw your face and heard your voice would have rendered hers more hateful. The only comfort you can give me is to let me know that—I have not spoiled your life. I shall live mine with the hourly prayer that the time may be hastened when you will forget that you ever loved me. What was my glory yesterday is the millstone that sinks me to the bottomless abyss to-day.”

The tone in which he said this drew her irresistibly to his side again; it was sharp with the accent of unendurable pain.

“Philip,” she cried, seizing his reluctant hand in pas-

sionate appeal, "you ask of me more than I can do or God requires! You must not insist on separating yourself from me. Will you deny me the help that would come from seeing how you live your life?"

"Not if I thought it would help you; but I shall live my life as the galley-slave lives his—not escaping from it because chained to the oar."

"It seems so now," she said, breathlessly, for the aspect of the averted face was almost more than she could bear; "but *you* will not be long held under such a yoke as that. You belong to the men who forge their spiritual weapons out of suffering. God, who knows the secrets of all hearts, has perhaps marked out these lines of sharp denial and daily martyrdom instead of those you would have chosen for yourself, and—you will not be unworthy of your vocation, Philip?"

"Sweet saint!" he answered, and put her hand reverently to his lips; but the thought in his own mind was that divine service cannot be based on the violation of all which he held most sacred.

"Bear with one word more," she added; "it may help you a little to remember that—Anna did not know the wrong she was doing us."

"I remember it thankfully; neither my heart nor yours will be given to her for prey, but—you must not plead for her, Honor."

Then silence fell between them, he still retaining the hand he had taken, and she leaning against his shoulder. He longed with strenuous desire to cut short an interview which had exhausted him more even than he had feared; but he knew that the tender woman clinging to his side was still loath to let him go. Presently he said, more gently than he had spoken before:

"There is some comfort which you will not begrudge me, Honor, in the thought that our engagement is not generally known; it would have distressed me greatly if your name had been publicly associated with mine. Miss Earle and Oliver must keep our secret."

"But you will send some message to Oliver?" she urged.

He shook his head. "All that will be outside my life in the future. Oliver must draw his own conclusions."

Then he drew her more closely toward him, and bending over her, gazed into her sweet face with a concentrated yearning. He gave no other expression to the

despair which filled his heart as they thus exchanged their speechless farewell. He kissed her once or twice on lips and brow, but with a chastened tenderness, as if passion were exhausted.

"Forgive me; I shall never kiss you any more; kiss me again and yet again, Honor—my pure saint, my own unwedded wife! I thank God my uncle did not live to see this day!"

He released her from his embrace, and had turned to leave the room when the door was sharply opened, and Miss Earle advanced toward them. She looked from him to Honor with keen, suspicious glances.

"Forgive me," she said, "if I am unwelcome; but I could not stay longer away when I knew that you were the bearer of bad tidings to my beloved daughter. What is wrong, Sir Philip?"

"You have every right to inquire," he said. "I am prepared to explain, but it must be after Honor has left the room."

"Let me stay," she pleaded—"I can make it a little easier for you;" but he answered her by a glance of resolute denial, opening the door for her departure, and closing it again quietly after her.

"We had bidden each other farewell before you entered," he explained to Miss Earle. "I am now at your service. Allow me to do that for you."

We have said that the room was but dimly lighted. Miss Earle had taken up a taper, and was applying it with quick, angry movements to the chandelier above her head. She could not read his face as she wished.

"Is that enough?" turning toward her in the full blaze of the illumination, and meeting her gaze steadily, in spite of the inward recoil of his whole nature from the scene about to be forced upon him.

She looked at him with a feeling of stupefaction; a vague idea occurred to her that he had been guilty of some sudden crime. What else could have happened to change him in so brief an interval?

His next words seemed to give color to her suspicion.

"Will you permit me to give you my explanation by letter?" he asked.

He was a strong man both in body and mind; but the equipoise of the finest organizations can only resist the stress of circumstance up to a certain point, and he had tasted no food that day, though he was scarcely con-

scious of the fact. He was, however, painfully conscious of a failure of power, which it needed a desperate effort to resist successfully; also, he had not prepared himself for this repetition of his punishment.

"Pardon me," she said coldly, "I cannot consent to wait. Your proposal means in effect that my poor Honor should tell your story instead of you. That would not be fair."

"No," he said, "that would not be fair. I am come to-day to get Honor's consent to break our engagement—or rather, that is not absolutely true, I have already broken it, and came to tell her so. The thing is without appeal."

His hard, repellant manner had returned, and increased her indignation and bewilderment.

"Explain!" she demanded haughtily. "But, whatever the cause, I will never forgive the man who has ruined Honor's life. Also, there are others better qualified than I to call you to account for an injury you scarcely condescend to recognize."

"Hear what I have to say, and judge me afterward," he answered. And then once more he told his miserable story; with the same conciseness as before, and with scarcely less pain and repugnance.

When he had done, Miss Earle, who had listened not without angry and imperative interruption, said harshly:

"Do you expect that I shall justify your conduct, or agree that it is necessary to sacrifice Honor in order to preserve the reputation of an infamous girl like Anna Trevelyan? The matter is not so easily arranged as you seem to imagine. I have always mistrusted you, Sir Philip—you were too good to be true. How do I know you have not played us false? You were free till you chose to be bound—the girl has always cared for you. If you suffer"—she glanced keenly at him—"I have no pity for you. I wish you could add Honor's pain to your own!"

"Such wishes are vain," he said coldly, "and it has ceased to be a matter of consequence to me in what light you view my character or my conduct. I have told you the truth; but you will, of course, accept or reject it at your discretion, and take what action you think right in the matter. Only—if you have any divine charity in your soul—I appeal to it not to betray to any other person that Miss Aylmer and I have been engaged. Also,

I trust to the honor you have not pledged to keep secret these circumstances I have just related to you."

"I refuse to give any such pledges; it is effrontery to demand them."

"I do not demand," he answered, "but solicit, and for the sake of her we both love. You will consider——" he stopped. "Perhaps it is not necessary to say any more. Have I your permission to take my leave?"

Her woman's heart yielded a little.

"Not till you have taken some refreshment," she said, preserving the ice of her tone while her eyes softened. "Honor in her trouble has forgotten the duties of a hostess—let me order something to be served for you in the breakfast-room."

"I could not eat," he answered; "but I am thankful to take away with me the recollection of your goodness."

Five minutes later he was driving back to Trichester in the hack-fly which had brought him from the station.

He spent the night at the newly-erected meagre Railway Inn, and took the first train to town on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear:
It seems too much like a fate indeed!
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed."

—R. BROWNING.

MR. AND MRS. SYLVESTRE had taken up their quarters at Haxell's Hotel, as a judicious compromise between the West End and the City, and thither they withdrew with Anna. The interval that was to elapse before the Saturday morning which was to relieve Mrs. Sylvestre of a charge reluctantly accepted and grudgingly fulfilled, dragged heavily for all the parties concerned.

Mr. Sylvestre was, of course, free to employ himself about town as well as a country parson is able to do at the deadest season of the year, and he had also the not altogether disagreeable responsibility of making the necessary arrangements for the wedding. An old col-

lege friend happened to be the incumbent of the neighboring church of St. Barnabas, and had readily agreed to perform the ceremony and give any advice or assistance in his power. Mr. Sylvestre had offered what he considered a very plausible explanation of the haste and privacy of the marriage; but he had not succeeded in disabusing his friend's mind of a certain amount of suspicion, mixed with a still larger measure of curiosity.

The Rev. Edward Dormer had naturally considered it his duty to call upon Mrs. Sylvestre and her niece, but had been disappointed in the object he had in view. Anna was not allowed to be seen, being kept in strict seclusion by her aunt, with the exception of a daily constitutional in the Temple Gardens. An old bencher, who was one of Mrs. Sylvestre's few influential friends, had placed the key of this sacred enclosure at her disposal, as well as his opinion and advice in respect to the legal aspect of the marriage now impending. This gentleman had asked her if no settlements had been made on her niece by Sir Philip Methuen, and evidently received her negative as a proof of gross negligence on the part of the girl's friends, and lack of proper behavior on that of the bridegroom; but Mrs. Sylvestre silenced his suggestions with decision. It was a matter of no consequence to her that Anna would be entirely dependent on the liberality of her future husband, or indeed whether that husband would be liberal or otherwise; while the prospect of any postponement of the marriage filled her with anxiety and apprehension.

It would perhaps be wrong to say that she rejoiced in the circumstances which were to find their climax in this forced union; but at least the result had so much that was consolatory in it as to reduce her regret to a minimum.

To see Anna Trevelyan the wife of Sir Philip Methuen was not indeed equal to the greater and far more comfortable distinction which Adrian Earle had offered her, and was attended by drawbacks of a very substantial kind; but it was a great deal better than she had ever ventured to expect, and relieved her of an odious responsibility. Of course she would not be able to permit any friendly intercourse between the two families; but as regarded any conscientious scruples on the girl's own account, she naturally argued that Anna's reputation must take precedence even of her spiritual welfare,

and had almost entertained a doubt whether the Catholic idolatry itself might not be better than sheer infidelity.

Anna passed these days for the most part in the solitude of her dreary bedchamber. She was neither submissive nor recalcitrant, neither humbled nor defiant—she lived in a condition of suspense rendered endurable by deliberate realistic dreaming.

She mapped out with curious precision the way in which she would spend her time at Methuen Place, and how she would reopen and decorate the old family house in South Audley Street, disused for half a generation—the alterations she would make, the society she would organize, the effect she would produce by her own brilliant personality. She would make friends again with Earlescourt (her latent suspicion and jealousy of Honor Aylmer lending only zest to the prospect), and dazzle them with the practical fulfilment of the hopes and ambitions she had often discussed under that roof. They would see that Anna Trevelyan, arrogant as they thought her, had not rated her value too high—Sir Philip Methuen had indorsed the estimate. The man whom they all admired had chosen her for his wife.

Chosen! It may be asked whether the girl were so blind and insensate as not to be able to understand the meaning of the miserable scene in which she had just borne a part—whether the signs of indifference, not to say of repugnance and the sharp anguish of coercion had not been sufficiently manifest?

For all this Anna Trevelyan had one inclusive explanation—it was the ascetic devotion of the priest to the rule of celibacy. He did not love her—no!—but he thought love a weakness and marriage almost a crime, and her ardor offended him because his manhood was still under a yoke. But this was simply a prejudice of education, that was to yield, like the ice-crowned mountain-tops under the heat of summer suns, to the breath of her passion.

That he did not love Honor Aylmer was proved to her satisfaction by the bare fact of his yielding to the pressure put upon him; had he done so, she argued (for we all reason self-outward), he would have refused to yield.

If a certain recoil is felt from this condition of mind as unwomanly and unnatural, it should be remembered that the warm blood of the South flowed in her veins; that where no spiritual faith exists self-gratification is apt

to become at once the creed and goal of life and, in fuller extenuation, that the love had grown from childhood with her growth, and retained something of the artlessness and familiarity of the past with the tumult and intemperance of the present.

Mrs. Sylvestre had been greatly exercised in mind in respect to Anna's *trousseau*, or rather of the entire deficiency of such provision. She met the difficulty by telegraphing to her daughters to forward to Haxell's Hotel the best part of their cousin's wardrobe, and by deciding that a certain travelling suit which it contained would answer fairly for the marriage ceremony.

She had not the least idea what Methuen's plans would be after he and Anna were man and wife, but he was scarcely likely to propose a return to Bruton Street. And in case of going home to Skeffington or of a more distant journey, it would be well to have the bride properly equipped.

She still nourished a secret mistrust, as perhaps we all have a tendency to do when the thing expected seems too good to be true, and which was strengthened by her fundamental belief that subterfuge and falsehood were held as very venial sins by men of his persuasion. Mr. Sylvestre, contrary to agreement, had called once or twice in Bruton Street to discuss this point or that with the distinguished principal, as he called Methuen with mild jocularly, but on none of these occasions had he been admitted. "Sir Philip Methuen was out," was the invariable answer.

Her anxieties were, however, put at rest by a note received from him late on Friday evening, accepting all Mr. Sylvestre's arrangements, and stating that he would be in St. Barnabas' Church at the hour appointed.

No human satisfaction, however, is perfect, and there was a clause in the letter which almost overthrew Mrs. Sylvestre's equilibrium.

"I propose that the marriage ceremony shall be immediately repeated at the Catholic chapel in ——— Street."

"Does he conceive," she demanded, "that we shall compromise ourselves to the extent of assisting at an idolatrous rite? Why, I believe they speak of marriage as a sacrament!"

She herself spoke as if even that degree of acquaintance with the dogmas of a noxious superstition was

almost more than could be justified in a right-minded person.

"My dear," replied the vicar, quietly, "our niece will be quite enough married for you and me by my good friend Mr. Dormer and myself—she will then be Sir Philip Methuen's wife as hard and fast as the laws of England can make her; but he does not recognize our orders, and I hold it as a point of honorable feeling that he is willing to make the union binding from his own point of view. You would wish him to consider himself her husband? It will simply be a bowing down in the house of Rimmon!"

At ten o'clock on the following morning Mrs. Sylvestre and Anna entered St. Barnabas' Church. The vicar had preceded them some time before, as he was to take part of the service, and had arranged to breakfast with his friend.

The persistent rain was still falling, and the church, closed all the week, looked more like an opened tomb than a sacred place of resort. The vacancy and dreariness were increased by the week-day aspect of inverted cushions, and linen cloths over the more elaborate pieces of the ecclesiastical furniture.

The altar itself had not been uncovered; fine holland concealed its costly drapery, recently presented by a wealthy parishioner. Why should it have been untimely disclosed before the decency of Sunday observance made it necessary—its suggestive services would not be called into requisition on this occasion?

Anna was in a mood of controlled but intense excitement. A little more and her hand would be taken by the man to walk by whose side through life was the prayer of her soul, and no power could prevail hereafter to force them asunder. Was he there?

Her eager eyes scanned the vicinity of the altar with searching scrutiny; but almost before she realized her disappointment, he stepped out of a side pew, deep in the shadow of a heavy pillar, and came forward to greet them. He was accompanied by a friend, whose physiognomy and garb at once announced him as a Roman Catholic priest, and upon whose fine, sharply-cut face Mrs. Sylvestre gazed with haughty misgiving. At the same moment a few stragglers, attracted by the open door and the waiting cabs outside, sauntered into the church. The two clergymen entered from the vestry,

and after a short whispered colloquy, they came forward to the communion-rails and signified their readiness to begin the service.

Philip placed himself on the right hand of the chancel-steps, with his companion standing close behind him; and Mrs. Sylvestre led her niece forward, and stood beside her, with an expression upon her face which indicated a sense of righteous displeasure. The necessity she felt under to watch the emissary of Satan opposite her, who supported the bridegroom, somewhat diverted the attention she was anxious to give to the latter; but, as she scornfully said to herself, they were cast in the same mold. They were both pale, quiet to immobility, and with a reserve of expression which baffled her penetration. She had observed keenly when she gave Methuen the wedding-ring (which it had been her function to procure) that the hand which took it was perfectly steady, and that the voice which greeted them in those few hurried moments was the same. But she was by no means deficient in acuteness, and the completeness of his mastery over himself only deepened the conviction of the severity of the effort which had been required. The days which had elapsed since she saw him last seemed to have wrought the effect of years upon him, although to her mind the sternly beautiful face was more attractive than his former sweet and winning aspect had been.

As the service proceeded, a feeling of reluctant sympathy and respect stirred in her mind toward him. She pitied any man who was to be the husband of Anna Trevelyan; but this man had reasons of his own which made the union abhorrent to him, and yet had succeeded in ordering his looks and manner into such complete subserviency to his will. Anna would be in strong hands, she said to herself with a grim smile.

Only once did she see his countenance change; it was when for a moment Mr. Dormer held their united hands under his own as he pronounced the momentous words which rendered the marriage bond indissoluble.

The change was an indefinable one: a slight increase of pallor, a hardening of the lines of the resolute face, a deepening of purpose in the steadfast eyes; but it meant the instinctive revolt of his whole nature against the unnatural contract, and the renewed suppression of that revolt by strength of will.

As soon as the ceremony was over, he lifted his wife's hand to his lips, and received the congratulations of the little group with proper recognition. He introduced his companion with an air of marked deference to the two clergymen, who did not recognize the well-known name, as Father Florentius, and asked if they would return his courtesy by assisting in their turn at the ceremony which was immediately to follow according to the rites of his own Church.

Mr. Dormer, however, excused himself on the plea of further "duty," meeting the graceful cordiality of the priest with that amount of reserve and stiffness which marked his sense of the ecclesiastical gulf which divided them.

During the few minutes spent in the vestry for the necessary signatures, Mrs. Sylvestre was astonished to find herself yielding to the irresistible charm of Father Florentius' manners. He had the happiest art of saying, even of looking, the things most acceptable to the person addressed, and so filled the situation by his tact and fluent courtesies, that any omissions on the part of Methuen were not likely to be noticed.

His recognition of Anna was so masterly an exhibition of high-breeding, conveying at once interest, admiration, and delicate respect, that Mr. Dormer was irresistibly conscious of the inferiority of his own greeting; and the girl herself, who could scarcely resist the depressing influence of her new husband's reserve, brightened and responded.

The chapel was not more than ten minutes' distance from St. Barnabas Church, and the party reached it in two cabs. During that brief interval Philip said:

"I hope you will be satisfied with the arrangements I have made—I thought you would like to go direct to Florence. Do you feel equal to crossing the Channel to-night?"

She looked down for a moment, conscious that it was not what she liked. She would have liked to carry home her triumph to Methuen Place—to have smiled defiance into Mrs. Gibson's keen, suspicious face—to have kissed Honor Aylmer's cheek and whispered: "I have won what I never meant to lose!" Then she glanced across at her companion, and her reluctance vanished.

"It is no matter to me where I go, so long as you are with me, Philip."

She stopped, her pale face suddenly suffused with a glow of color.

"You have not kissed me yet," she said. "Kiss me now!"

She put her arms about his neck and her warm red lips to his, and felt with a thrill of triumph that the pressure was returned.

It was not likely to be Philip Methuen's way to remit any point of service to which his honor pledged him—it would have been not only a cruelty but a fraud to reject the caresses of the passionate girl who had cast her reputation at his feet. The task required of him was one that made life look haggard and bankrupt in the long future that probably stretched before them, but he had accepted it.

To his mind that meant neither flight nor evasion.

An hour later Mr. and Mrs. Sylvestre were standing alone on the main-line departure platform at Charing Cross, watching the express as it dashed out into the murky drizzle. She had bidden Lady Methuen farewell with a complacency that could never have been gained by Anna Trevelyan. As they turned slowly and began to walk toward their hotel, the vicar remarked:

"Do you really think that Philip Methuen does not care for Anna? It is a very shocking idea, and no new husband could possibly be more attentive."

"In the way of magazines, newspapers, and wraps, it would be quite impossible," she answered, with a curious inflection in her voice. "It is also evident that he is not prepared for much conversation on their journey, nor for what there is being of a confidential nature. Perhaps you did not observe the dexterity with which he avoided the empty carriages? But the future is their own affair. Thank God, I have done with Anna Trevelyan!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part."

—R. BROWNING.

THERE are many ways of meeting the irremediable. A man may face it with absolute austerity, yielding what is exacted without protest or complaint, but add-

ing to it no grace of gentleness or heroic effort at amelioration. In a sense, it is comparatively easy to do the thing we have admitted it to be our duty to do, with a hand of iron and a heart of steel; but it is infinitely hard to appear to fulfil the unwelcome task with the gracious freedom and fulness which flow spontaneously toward the work we choose for ourselves and love to perform.

Amid all the cross-currents of life there is none more baffling nor disastrous than an ill-assorted marriage. It is not a situation in which worth and honor show in heroic proportions, but it is one in which a man's or woman's capacity to endure and conquer may be tested to an extent which makes all other martyrdoms poor and superficial.

Philip Methuen has been married six months, and it must be allowed that so far he has fulfilled his duties on the lines of hard necessity alone. Anna had her rights as his wife, and they were rendered, but not a jot beyond.

They went abroad, and he allowed her unlimited choice as to where they should go or how long they should stay; but it was he who decided what society they should keep, and how they should employ their time. Whatever appeared reasonable or right for Anna to do or to enjoy he conceded, and was her unwearied companion in the doing or the enjoyment of it; but there was no appeal from his decisions.

During the excitement of constant change of place and scene, and the new bliss of their union, the young wife was fairly acquiescent; but six months is a period long enough to test the patience and credulity of the most love-stricken, and Lady Methuen was slowly awakening to a sense of disappointment and resentment. As was characteristic, her grievances were of a low and personal kind. She was so beautiful that every man's eye which rested upon her quickened, bringing her the indisputable tribute which she felt to be her right; but her husband's face never glowed nor softened as he looked at her, although that beauty was his own inalienable possession, and she did her best to use it for the conquest of his senses and his heart.

Over and over again had she presented herself to him in some new toilet of bewitchery, or under conditions of studied negligence and effective dishevelment which instinct taught her were more potent still; but no fire had

lighted the sombre eyes, nor any responsive smile of perception parted the lips. With the vehement contrariety of her nature, his coldness only served to stimulate her ardor; if he had fully reciprocated her passion, it probably would have cooled.

Easter fell early the ensuing year, and they returned to Rome to spend it there, diligently attending the elaborate and incessant services of the Church—the one as a point of acceptable duty, the other as offering the best field of display for her beauty and distinction of dress. A few days after their marriage, Philip had said to her:

“I think you profess to be an unbeliever, Anna; but you will be willing to allow that this is the result of early influences, not of any thinking or experience of your own. You are now bound to spend your life with a man who believes in God, and I shall require you, as my wife, to attend the services of the Church—not too strictly, but enough to give the opportunity of some word of divine conviction reaching your heart.”

“Will you not also give me good books to read, and argue with me, so as to show me my errors?” she asked, with a sort of tender mockery.

“No,” he answered, “I shall not do that, unless the time should come that you ask to be taught in the true spirit of humility. It is not a perversion of the intellect with you so much as a fault of character.”

“I would as soon kneel beside you as sit beside you,” she said, “and I like to watch you at your prayers.”

This, as we have said, was in the first days of their marriage; but when Easter found them at Rome, six months had passed, and Anna was weary of travel, and had already begun to question whether life with Philip Methuen were quite equal to her expectations, and to answer the doubt with a bitter and passionate denial.

The constant restraint he exercised over her conduct; his absolute indifference to the pleasures of the shifting society of Continental cities, even although he did not prevent her from taking her share of them; the gravity of his personal pursuits; the austerity of his rule of life; the unreasonable amount of time and money he gave to matters of philanthropy and religion—burdened and chafed her temper almost past endurance.

But, after all, this was not the core of the girl's disappointment. That lay in the fact that the conquest of his heart, of which she had made so sure—the yielding

of his nature into the softness of passion under her influence—seemed as far off now as ever.

Rather, indeed, the chances were more remote and hopeless: with the vehement and sensuous temperament and keen faculty of insight, she could not hide from herself that either this man, whom she adored, was incapable of loving, or that she, in spite of her charms, was incapable of exciting the emotion in him. Then she missed, as all who knew him missed it, the sweetness and gentleness which had been his distinguishing characteristic.

The one circumstance that held her under restraint and rendered her life tolerable was that his indifference to the society and attractions of other women was so complete as to mitigate the crime of his insensibility to herself; for if once the idea had been received by her mind that what was withheld from her was bestowed elsewhere, her pain and wrath would have burst all bounds.

Another stone of offence in Anna Methuen's path was one over which it may be considered that she legitimately stumbled—her husband's refusal to return to England and go home. On this point she had the courage to renew the discussion time after time, feeling that she had right on her side.

One morning at this period, Anna was sitting alone in the fine *salon* of the suite of apartments they occupied in the Strada del Popolo. All the windows were open to the warm air, revealing a faint blue sky without fleck or cloud and palpitating with meridian heat and light; while, on the left side of the outlook, one could glimpse the terraces of the Pincio, with the white gleam of marble amid its pines and cypress.

She was dressed in a faint cinnamon-tinted gown, of so slight a texture as to define, almost too obviously, the outlines of the superb form it covered; and the hair, which was well drawn back from the perfect face and twisted into heavy coils in the creamy nape of her neck, caught shades of bronze and gold in the sunshine, where she sat with a book between her languid fingers.

She had declined her husband's invitation to go out of doors, and now sat impatiently awaiting his return. Later in the day she would "receive," as was her habit on two days of the week, and would have the gratification of having her rooms thronged by the select few of

native Roman society, and a more miscellaneous crowd of distinguished English and American strangers. For that occasion she had a new tea-gown prepared after her own artistic device, so unique and beautiful that it might almost have made the Medicean Venus herself dissatisfied with her unadorned perfection. But till that hour of social triumph arrived, there was a long spell of time to get through, and Philip's absence was unduly protracted. She was always eager for his return when they were apart; but to-day she had a speech ready prepared to greet him, and was wearying to test its effect.

When he came in she rose from her seat at the further end of the room, and went toward him, book in hand.

"You sometimes scold me, Philip, because I never read; but I have been reading one of your books this morning, and found something which has almost made me cry with longing and vexation. I will read it to you." And she read aloud those well-known and probably best-quoted lines of Robert Browning:

"Oh, to be in England now that April's there!
And whoever wakes in England sees some morning unaware
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!"

She closed the book and put it down, still keeping her eyes on his face. "Think of Methuen Park," she said. "Once more, will you take me home? I am more sick of Italy than words can say!"

He looked at her from head to foot, for her toilet was of a kind to challenge attention, saw how beautiful she was, and how boldly aggressive in her consciousness of the fact, and—hated that beauty! Also he recalled how it was she alone who stood between him and his return from an exile which was far more painful to himself than to her.

"No," he answered, "I will not go home."

Another vision was before his eyes, so adorable in its noble sweetness and reticence as to wring his soul with an almost intolerable regret, and to give to his voice a harshness of which he was scarcely aware. He crossed the room as he spoke, and sat down on a couch a little in the shadow of the wall.

Anna, whose keen sight could have defied a much longer distance, stood where he had left her, and looked at him with intent observation.

"We have been married more than six months," she said—and there was a threatening vibration in her voice "and have been vagabonds all that time. I am sick of vagabondage! Methuen Place is my proper home and yours, and I love it. I love England in the spring better than at any other time. What I ask you to do is right and reasonable. Why do you refuse? You must have some very strong reason."

Philip was silent for a moment. Possibly, in order to preserve his sacred secret, he might have to yield this point, and had been ill advised in his persistent refusal.

"It is to be supposed," he answered, "that I have what appears to me good reason for what I do. The quiet life we should of necessity lead at Methuen Place you would soon tire of. You must know that there is a line of demarcation between me and our neighbors."

He had a sense of indignant shame as he said this, feeling such insincerity to be part of the ignominy of his position, and was also aware that his wife's acuteness detected the reserve and reluctance of his manner.

"As for that," she answered eagerly, catching at the symptoms of hesitation, "the remedy is in my own hands. I will undertake to readjust your social relations. All the county will call on Lady Methuen out of curiosity at first, and she will engage to make friends of the county. I shall also be able to amuse myself with improving and refurnishing the old house. Then there is another point you seem to overlook—that between us and our neighbors at Earlescourt there is assuredly no line of demarcation."

"Does it not occur to you, Anna, that the fact of your having refused Adrian Earle's offer of marriage will be a difficulty in regard to any renewal of our former intercourse?"

"I am not of that opinion at all," was her eager rejoinder. "Adrian and I parted the best friends in the world. Besides, would you wish me to give up the advantage of Honor Alymer's friendship and the satisfaction of amusing poor Oliver because—because I loved you and not him?"

She paused, but, as there was no response, went on again:

"Or, granting that there may be a little awkwardness at first, will you be at no trouble to get over it in order that I may still be able to profit from the example of a

girl you have always held up to me as a model? I presume you think as well now of Honor Aylmer as before you went to India?"

"Not as well," he answered, "but infinitely better. When I went to India I had only an imperfect knowledge of her character. During my uncle's last illness I was often, as you may probably know, at Earlescourt, and learned to do her fuller justice."

The manner was so natural, and the tone so quiet, that it once more shook the half-suspicion in Anna's mind.

"In that case," she answered, "it will be just as pleasant for you as for me to be friends again with the Earlescourt family. What is it worth to me that people here know me as your wife? In one sense the honor only counts in one's own country. I want Oliver and scornful Miss Earle, I want Honor Alymer herself, to see that I did not rate myself too high, or claim that to which I was not entitled," and the girl raised her beautiful head with an air of proud assurance, which baffled the man who heard and watched her. Presently she added, with a flash of her magnificent eyes—angry and hurt at the cold unresponsiveness of his manner: "Good as Miss Aylmer is, and perfect in your eyes, with wealth and position so far above poor Anna Trevelyan, at least she has been able to take from her the two men, neither of whom she would have refused to marry!"

He had tried by an imperative gesture to arrest the words before they left her tongue, but failed. She took a malicious pleasure in insulting the woman that he commended, and was in a mood to defy any indignation she might arouse. But as she met his eyes there was that in their concentrated anger and scorn which helped even her blind moral sense to perceive that the sin she had committed was a heinous one in his sight.

"I have stated an undeniable fact," she said, in defiance of her inward sinking of heart. "Why do you look at me, Philip, as if you hated me?"

"I pray God," he said, with intense expression, "that I may not hate the woman with whom I am bound to live; but *hate* is not the word to express the feeling she is capable of exciting in my mind."

And he got up and went out of the room.

He walked rapidly in the direction of the Pincian Hill; but the noontide heat was so intense that he soon turned aside into the sheltered gardens of the Villa Medici, and

sat down on one of the lichen-covered stone seats in the grateful shadow of the ilex-trees, the high hedges of dense box, which enclose the straight formal paths of the garden, shutting out the enchanting vista beyond. There lay the widespread Campagna, which had lost its vivid autumnal tints, and was now a delicious plain of vernal green waving with flowers, and beyond that gleamed the silver streak of intense white light where the sea melts into the horizon at Ostia.

But Methuen's object was to be free to think, not to admire the beauty which seemed an incongruous setting to such misery as his.

He had often speculated whether any hardship or misfortune could befall him which his native force of character, helped by religion, would not enable him to endure; but now he was already doubting whether it would be possible for him to live his life with a girl capable of such measureless indelicacy and bluntness of moral perception as Anna had just betrayed. The words which she had spoken were like the sting of a lash to the acute susceptibility with which he guarded the honor of the woman who had loved him.

He put it in this way to himself, for love had ceased to be lawful between them, and whatever was outside the range of duty was to each of them a thing to be conquered at all costs; but also the closer insight he had obtained into the depths of his wife's unworthiness strengthened his conviction of the necessity of preserving the sacred secret of their love.

And then, for a few moments, nature wrenched the mastery from his grasp, and he suffered his mind to dwell upon the lost possibilities of life—the wreck and bankruptcy which had overtaken him, turning light into darkness, and making of existence a load almost too heavy to be borne.

His memory forced upon him that terrible scene of parting in which the patience and devotion of Honor had touched a divine height, and enhanced the severity of renunciation. The dread of moral retrogression, too, was strong upon him. All his strength seemed drawn off into the daily struggle to endure and to forget, and he condemned himself as failing in tolerance and generosity toward his wife, in that he was abhorring what he should deplore, and hardening his heart against the manifestations of her love, where lay, perhaps, the one

chance of redemption, if redemption were possible for selfishness so overmastering as hers.

There were other considerations as well. Was the outcome of his life, hitherto so full of worthy ambitions, to be nothing beyond this domestic conflict, more or less successful, with attention to such side-issues as he might be able to give? Was this marriage to mulct him at all points—not only of happiness, but of the power of doing good in his generation? This waste of energy and opportunity—this burying of the talents of youth, faculty, and wealth—was a crime he dare not lay upon his conscience.

He would shake off this unmanly incubus, or, at least (for that was scarcely possible), do his work in life as well as might be under the weight of it; and perhaps—for Methuen's mind immediately turned toward putting principles into practice—it would be wise as well as kind to reconsider his wife's wishes and return to England. That did not mean—even a return to Methuen Place did not mean—renewed relations with Earlescourt; the instinct of every member of that family would fortify his own judgment and keep them apart.

On their way home he would visit Lord Sainsbury, who was still resident at Mentone, and of whose health he had received good accounts of late, and make the offer of his services to him in any way which seemed best. There was yet the stress of his late uncle's affectionate ambition binding upon his grateful memory.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Where ye feel your honor grip,
Let that aye be your border:
Its slightest touches, instant pause—
Debar a' side pretences,
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences."

—BURNS.

It seemed to Anna Methuen like one of the quips and cranks of an ironical fate, that some time after her husband had gone out, the servant brought her a card with Adrian Earle's name upon it, and asked whether the signora would see the gentleman before her appointed hour of receiving.

There was a brief pause of rapid consideration, the *antitheta* of compliance ranging themselves clearly

in her prompt and dexterous mind. Her decision was soon formed; there would be indisputable proof of the assertion she had so recently made, and a fresh point to urge in furtherance of her wishes; also here was relief for her intolerable *ennui*, and a tribute to her influence not to be despised in her present mood of irritation and depression.

A few moments later she was standing up, flushed and radiant, with outstretched hand, to welcome her visitor. She saw at the first glance that Adrian was looking better than she ever remembered to have seen him; he was tanned and braced by adventurous travel, and there was greater vigor both of body and mind in his aspect. And he, as he walked up the long *salon*, perceived that even his memory as a lover had never painted her so beautiful as she was, and that the familiar ring of her low, melodious voice, which he had taught himself to believe had lost its power over his heart—the very hopelessness of his passion curing itself—set all his pulses beating at fever-heat.

“Is it really you—so soon, Adrian?” she said. “How sweet and kind it is of you to come and see me! I am more pleased than words can say. But how did you know where to find us?”

“It is not a hard matter, Lady Methuen, for those who read their *Galignani* to discover the domicile of such distinguished visitors as yourselves. I landed at Brindisi a few days ago, and came on here for the Easter festivities. It is so long since I have seen a familiar face that I risked denial in the hope of seeing yours.”

“Why should I deny myself to you,” she asked, with that simple directness of speech which was one of her best characteristics, “if you are willing to be friends with me? You must stay and dine with us? All the world is coming to us this afternoon, and I should like you to see how I play my part as *dame-de-salon*. Besides, I have all your adventures to hear.”

So great was her own exhilaration that she did not stop to consider whether Adrian might not find some difficulty in responding to her unexpected familiarity and kindness; and when, shortly afterward, Methuen came in, she introduced their guest with a triumphant satisfaction, which only served to mark the contrast between her cordiality and her husband's courteous but reserved greeting.

To the latter this visit appeared a breach equally of right feeling and good taste, and he marvelled that Adrian Earle should have crossed the threshold of his door, when he could not but believe that he had been grossly wronged and misled. It was no small addition to Methuen's trouble that explanation on the point of his seeming treachery to his friend would be impossible; the facts of his marriage it would always be out of his own power to explain.

Anna, with that sort of deliberate effrontery she was in the habit of employing when she considered she had cause of complaint against her husband, did not allow his entrance to interrupt the easy flow of her talk with Adrian; and the radiant sweetness of her looks and the dulcet cadences of her voice moved Methuen to indignant sympathy, as he watched their effect in the changes of Earle's expressive face.

"Philip was only telling me this morning," she said, "that we could never be friends with Earlescourt any more; but since you have forgiven me, the difficulty is removed—no one else has a right to be angry."

"Perhaps not with you, Anna," interposed Methuen, quietly; "but Mr. Earle and I have a quarrel of our own which will effectually prevent our putting his magnanimity to the test in the future."

He looked at him as he spoke with a steadfast gravity of regard, not unmixed with kindness and regret, but Adrian did not choose to meet it. He lifted his eyebrows and made a corresponding movement of the shoulders in a characteristic way, as though the challenge were beneath his notice, and laughed his delicate, derisive laugh.

"There is not much depth in my nature, as you know, for memories either good or bad," he answered. "I am willing to be friends all round, and wipe out your offences, Philip, as well as those of—others. Twelve months' knocking about the world shows things in their true proportions. The wise man does not nurse resentments."

Philip bowed stiffly, and Anna said with effusion:

"You do not know how happy you make me! Half the pleasure of going home would be lost if your house were shut against us. Philip cannot stand out any longer. But I must go and change my gown. You will wait?—and dine? There are people coming who are

worth seeing; and at any rate I wish you to remain, if only to discover that I have at length developed a taste in dress. I shall be satisfied if you approve. Philip never looks at me."

As she went out, two other guests were introduced into the apartment—men of considerable political influence, whose names only were known to Adrian Earle, but whom it was an unmistakable honor to meet—and both he and Methuen welcomed the circumstance as relieving them from the disagreeable friction of a personal interview.

That afternoon afforded Anna Methuen one of her most acceptable triumphs, and on the strength of it her bearing to all those with whom she came into contact was more haughty, assured, and indifferent than her wont.

She read the effect of her beauty, accentuated by the picturesque costume which she wore, in the vivid glance of every man that looked at her, and in the guarded cordiality of the women who were her guests—appraising the one tribute as highly as the other.

Adrian stayed for an hour or two longer; but the crowd was so great, and Anna's Italian speech so fluent and swift, that he contented himself for the most part with watching and listening, in a mood made up of pain and cynicism. He smiled to himself to see what hard work Philip had to do to redress the balance of Anna's insolent exclusiveness and caprice by his own fine courtesy and tact, and even admitted to himself that few men could have fulfilled the difficult function better. The man looked older and altered to a degree that surprised Adrian Earle, judging from the physical effects of his own disappointment; but there was the same distinction and individuality of aspect and manner which always challenged attention, and perhaps justified the expression in Anna's face as he chanced to catch it when her eyes rested for a moment on her husband. Seeing that Adrian had noticed the look, she colored with vexation, and motioned him to come and speak to her.

"You see the girl to whom Philip is talking with that ridiculous air of interest and respect? She is Vittoria Orsini, a girl of good birth, only just let out of her convent, and without two ideas in her head. She is not in the least beautiful—is she? Can you help me to understand why he looks at her like that?"

It would have puzzled, or perhaps even disillusioned, any other man but one who had known Anna Trevelyan from a girl, that such a question could have been proposed by her to himself. As it was, he swallowed his distaste, and contented himself with answering a little spitefully:

"She is very pretty and innocent-looking, and is of the type of woman whom Methuen admires."

Anna turned a little pale. "Ah, you want to punish me! Don't make any mistakes. It may not seem so, but—I am still very fond of Philip."

"And you scarcely expected your constancy to last so long? Six months, is it? Well, I could scarcely have been justified in forgiving you if you had spoiled my life for less than that."

"Spoiled your life!" she repeated, disdainfully. "I never saw you look so well and self-satisfied before. I—I should like to ask you a question. Who told you that Philip and I were married?"

The color came into her cheek and a spark of fire into her eyes.

Adrian glanced at her, and then looked with a disengaged air across the room.

"I saw the announcement in all the papers when I got back to Paris. I was then on my way home, but—I took another departure. I was stricken with a sudden desire to see the Soudan with my own eyes and went, and extended my tour afterward up and down the Nile. I am going to write a book about Egypt."

"You mean that your own people did not mention it in their letters?"

"They mentioned it simply as an event that had happened—nothing more."

And then he turned and looked at her intently.

She was still watching her husband, and her eyes had a tender, wistful look, such as he had never seen in them before, except in connection with this man's name. It quickened his sense of enmity against him.

"It is an impertinence," he said, "to ask a six months' old wife whether she is happy; but—you sacrificed me without the hesitation of a moment in order to become so. Are you quite satisfied with the result?"

She closed her eyes for a moment, as if to help her inward search; then her bosom heaved, and the corners of her beautiful mouth drooped a little.

"If you had had your way and married me," she answered, "how tired we should have been of each other by this time! It is a great strain on human nature to have to live most of the twenty-four hours in each other's company, and you cannot fairly judge of this without proving it; but still there is only one man in the world with whom I could bear it, and he might make it easier to bear. Philip!"

Her accent, laden with passion, was the same as of old; the same as when she stood, a pale, crude, forlorn girl, by his side, and looked down for the first time upon Methuen Place. Adrian winced under it, in spite of the resistance of his wounded pride. His eyes involuntarily followed the direction of hers; and Methuen, as if feeling the magnetism of their gaze, stopped in what he was saying to the lily-fair girl at his side, and glanced toward them. His face had a cold, hard look in it, which was new to Adrian's former knowledge of him.

Obeying an irresistible movement of his mind, without giving himself time for reflection, he said, in a low, intense whisper:

"He is not unkind to you, Anna?"

Anna threw up her magnificent head; her love and her pride were cut to the quick by the lack of response on Philip's part, fully conscious as she was what her own face must have expressed.

"He is not unkind," she answered; "he is cruel."

She gave him no time to reply, nor, as he saw with an angry pain, did she so much as glance toward him to see the effect of her words. The next moment she was answering the gracious courtesies of a certain dignitary of the Church, high in favor at the Quirinal, who was pledging himself to procure for her an introduction to the inner court circle which it had suddenly occurred to her she should like to obtain; and Adrian made his way through the throng, intending to disappear without leave-taking to either host or hostess.

This purpose was, however, frustrated by Philip, who, seeing his intention, came forward to speak to him.

"You will not, then, accept Lady Methuen's invitation to dine with us this evening?"

"No," he answered brusquely, "I will not. I should risk too much."

"Then you are in the right to refuse. It will perhaps

be better that you should not come here any more. We are leaving Rome almost immediately."

Adrian nodded, and passed on without shaking hands. It was his way of marking resentment—the only vent he allowed himself for the rage and pity of his soul.

That night, when dinner was over and dessert on the table, the tall wax-candles scarcely flickering, though the windows stood wide open, Philip said to his wife:

"I have thought over what you asked me this morning, and have decided to do as you wish. We will leave for England as soon as you please."

Anna continued to play with the strawberries on her plate for a few moments longer in silence; then she looked up.

"You would not have yielded if Adrian Earle had not turned up to-day. You are willing to go now what you refused before, because, at the same time, you take away from me a pleasure almost as great as the one you have persuaded yourself to grant."

"I do not understand you," he began; and then he suddenly dropped the cold reserve of his manner, and a softer expression came into his face.

"Anna," he said, kindly, "there must be an end to this strife and contradiction between us; it lowers both of us. I know that I have often failed in patience and consideration, but I will be more careful not to vex you in the future; and you on your side must try to be more reasonable and conciliatory. Shall it be a contract between us?"

He had meant to infuse more affectionateness into his words and manner; but the sweetness and tenderness seemed beyond his power to force or simulate, and he felt he had failed as he met Anna's eyes.

"Let us talk about your part of the contract first," she answered. "Do you mean to behave like other men when we get back to England? I mean, will you allow me to take my proper place in English society? Will you write to your lawyers at once—say to-morrow—and give orders to have the house in South Audley Street put in proper repair, and furnished as it ought to be at the beginning of a new reign? And while that is going on, will you take apartments or a house in town, so that I can have my own way as regards details and decoration, and enjoy a London season in my own right? Will you do this?"

There was provocation and defiance in her tone, but he was strictly on guard.

"Yes," he said, "within certain limits I am prepared to do this."

"But that is not all," she continued, and she put her elbows on the table, and leaned her dainty chin upon her clasped hands, with her beautiful eyes full on his face. "When our house is ready, will you consent to entertain in a proper manner—not in your narrow exclusive sect, but without distinction beyond that of social advantage?"

He smiled a little, with that sort of aloofness from her power to wound, which hurt her heart and pride alike.

"I shall always reserve to myself the duty of choosing the society we keep," he answered; "but I have never been accustomed to confine it to members of my own communion, which is not a sect, little Anna, but the dominant creed of Christendom. For the rest, I am not only willing but anxious to meet your wishes so far as my means allow."

"Your means!" she repeated. "Are you not rich?"

"I am not rich as Sir Walter Earle is rich, and I have heavy arrears of obligation to meet. A great deal of building needs to be done in Skeffington; and there are some streets in Crawford, which are part of the Methuen estate, which admit of no improvement without complete demolition."

"And you will waste your money like that!" she cried. "And when life is so short, and so soon over, and wants so much to make it bearable! I do not think that this is fair to your wife."

"It will make no difference to my wife. I have already given instructions to my lawyers, Anna, to draw up a deed of settlement which will make you quite independent of me as regards your personal expenses. But these different claims will leave no margin for extravagance or ostentation."

"And is the money you allow me calculated on the lines of my poverty and friendlessness, or——" and she paused without finishing her sentence.

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I think it is; at least Messrs. Chapman & Hurst tell me that it exceeds the provision made by my late uncle on behalf of his wife, and therefore it can scarcely be considered as below your rights——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, eagerly interrupting him, "she

and I don't stand on an equality! I have heard Sir Walter Earle say that Sir Giles Methuen adored his wife. You know quite well that the scale in which my claims are weighed is empty of all that, and you throw in more gold to make the balance even! Do you remember you spoke just now of patience and consideration? Such words are an insult to me. Philip, I shall learn to hate you if you will not love me a little for my much!"

She pushed back her chair from the table, and, getting up, came half-way toward him, then stopped short, with her clasped hands crossed on her breast, and her beautiful head bowed in an attitude almost of supplication.

"I wonder you can resist me!" she said, in her low *trâinante* voice.

The color rushed into his face, and his brow contracted. The capriciousness of a temper which veered from insult to tenderness within the space of ten minutes—a love which demanded and offered caresses only as proof and test of its existence, and ignored or outraged the deepest feelings of his nature—which stooped to the arts of the mistress instead of maintaining the dignity of a wife—revolted him, and closed his heart against her, and would have done so without the effectual barrier of absolute preoccupation. Had Anna known it, she could not have riveted the bonds of the old love more firmly than by offering perpetually so glaring a contrast.

And yet he condemned himself, inasmuch as he could not coerce his soul to the fealty to which he had pledged himself. Had her love been nobler, it might have subdued him—but such as it was!

Such as it was, some response was required from him.

He rose to meet her advance, and taking her hands in his, drew her close to him and looked earnestly into the expectant flushed face raised to his.

"You do both of us a great wrong," he said, "when you take this posture of humility, and beg me to care for you a little. I have cared for you, Anna, since the day we first met—do you remember? Your father took me to the Fiesole farm to see you, and you ran and hid yourself behind the pine-stack, and could not be persuaded to come out and show yourself. In those early days you used to scold me because I did not kiss you often enough. I am just the same now as then. I have never lived with tender women, nor learned to show affection after their fashion; but it exists. Anna, there is nothing lies so

near my heart as your happiness and welfare. Do not let us quarrel!"

He stooped and kissed her as he spoke; and she, moved by a finer instinct than her wont, forbore to fling her arms about his neck and repay his kindness with her ardor.

"If I could be quite sure," she answered, leaning her lovely head upon his shoulder, "that it is your way to love in this reluctant fashion, and that you are keeping nothing back from me! But if I thought or knew the woman lived whom you could have loved better than me—in another fashion—it would be a bad day for all three of us when Anna Methuen made that discovery."

"That day will never come," he said quietly, and kissed her again as he spoke; but for the first time a doubt flashed across his mind whether he had taken the best and noblest way in concealing the length and breadth of the sacrifice which she had extorted from him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim descried.

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?"

—R. BROWNING.

THE three months which followed the Methuens' return to London were perhaps the happiest period which Anna had ever known. Philip, as she expressed it to herself, seemed to have turned over a new leaf, and to be bent on helping her to fulfil the programme of triumph and self-gratification she had marked out.

They took the house in Gloucester Place for the season—for so searching were Anna's reforms that there was no possibility of their own being ready for occupation—and very soon they had made good their admission into the innermost circles of London society. Their success was due in no small measure to the active friendship of Lord Sainsbury, who in their behalf threw off the indolent cynicism with which he was credited.

He did his utmost, by his own generous recognition of Methuen's former services and worth, to indicate to his immediate friends the terms on which he accounted him entitled to be received, and extended to his wife so much kindness and consideration as served at once for a *cachet* of distinction. Lord Sainsbury's efforts were seconded by his widowed sister, Mrs. Auchester, who was the mistress of his house, and his ready co-operator at all points; and Anna, at once flattered and grateful, showed to better advantage than at any former period. A girl so beautiful as she was bestowed pleasure and conferred distinction upon any company that she joined, and her personality was so unique and brilliant that it enhanced the first impression of her good looks. She was neither intellectual nor well read, and almost as ignorant of the great questions of the day as she was indifferent to them—self being the centre of all her radiations; but she had great tact and promptness of perception, and could not only cover her ignorance adroitly, but, by guarded generalities and an air of wistful consideration, assume a knowledge she did not possess.

As a hostess, Lady Methuen did not excel, except in a certain artistic individuality as regarded the accessories of her table and surroundings; for she was too intent on monopolizing the chief share of attention and admiration, and found it irksome to be civil to other women without the direct view of personal advantage.

But here Methuen's innate and carefully trained courtesy helped to fill up her own shortcomings. He succeeded without effort where she failed, because the pleasure of each guest was not only the professed but actual object of his solicitude; and while every word and action seemed regulated by some unerring law of subtle adaptation, the absence of strain or self-consciousness was obvious to the most casual observer.

Although no longer officially connected with Lord Sainsbury, his time and services were still greatly at his former chief's command; and indeed it soon became pretty well understood in their own immediate circle that if there were any difficult work to be done on the lines of social or political philanthropy, demanding sustained and personally unremunerative labor, Philip Methuen was the man to fall back upon.

At the same time, he never permitted these engagements to interfere with Anna's legitimate claims; or

rather, while he put it in this way to himself, he was equally influenced by a deep-rooted mistrust of her discretion and right feeling. He not only rode with her in the Row when her mood inclined to so healthful an exercise, but he often sat beside her in her carriage during her unwearied afternoon perambulations—unwearied because the tributes offered to her vanity never ceased to please—whenever he knew she had no other suitable companion. When she was not under the sufficient chaperonage of Mrs. Auchester, he accompanied her to her evening amusements, and fulfilled the function of the hour without apparent grudging or impatience nor did he ever claim her gratitude or hold himself entitled to it, for sacrifices which were almost as hard as stern duty under any aspect could have exacted from him.

Anna was never unwilling to exhibit in society what accomplishments she possessed, and she would have been quite ready to exercise in its behoof her singular talent of improvisation, as well as her brilliant musical gifts, if Philip had not put an absolute veto on the exhibition of the latter. It was a point she yielded with the greatest reluctance, knowing her own powers of fascination; but she consented to do so as being fairly satisfied with the present state of things, and her husband's general subserviency to her will and pleasure.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Lady Methuen was neither an acute nor a delicate observer. A woman who could misinterpret, as she had done, the signs of repugnance and despair in the scene which had fixed her destiny, was scarcely likely to read aright the less marked and carefully guarded manifestations of Methuen's daily behavior. She was beginning to accept the studied kindness and conscientious observance as the nearest approach to love and its expression that his temperament admitted, and his incessant companionship as a proof of her growing influence. It is equally true that she still missed, with an angry pang, the response to her own ardor which she had felt so sure of awakening; but she was so absorbed in the novelty of her social triumphs that she had not the same leisure nor inclination to brood over her disappointment.

There was one, however, whose sagacity was more penetrating. Lord Sainsbury watched the young man whom he loved with an almost paternal anxiety and respect. Intimate as their relations were, Philip Methuen

held inviolate the secrets of his married life—no disclosure nor complaint ever passed his lips. Every attention and service offered to Anna was accepted by him with a cordial gratitude that could scarcely have taken a warmer tone, and his personal treatment of her was perfect in its consideration and loyalty. He was simply putting into practice the resolutions made in the Medici Gardens, and the purpose expressed to his wife before they left Rome; and that with a completeness and success which were the result of a harder struggle than the discipline of St. Sulpice, or the mission-field of the Corea would ever have exacted. But such victories leave their scars; and it often cut Lord Sainsbury to the heart to detect, in the tamed enthusiasms, the eager acceptance of work apart from personal choice or interest, and the constant effort to conceal his latent weariness and dissatisfaction, that Time had as yet brought to Methuen but little healing on its wings.

Gracious as this good friend was to Anna, and prepared to admit her attractions, he had no personal liking for her. Apart from the fact that she, in some way he did not understand, had spoiled the life of his friend, her obvious lack of all the nobler elements of character, and her conspicuous, unblushing self-seeking, were keenly discriminated by him; and there were moments when, reading by some instinctive movement how sharp was the jar received by the man doomed to be her life-companion, he could scarcely repress some manifestation of sympathy.

He had even questioned in his own mind whether he should break the reserve between them and solicit Methuen's confidence; but this would not have been easy in contact with the resolute silence the latter chose to observe, and which was carried out so completely, that he never recognized any hint or suggestion, however guarded or kind.

An incident, however, occurred about this time which broke down the barrier of reticence between them.

It happened one morning early in July that Lord Sainsbury and Philip were walking arm in arm across the Green Park, engaged in earnest discussion of an incident which had occurred in the Lower House the night before, and was regarded by the former as a significant indication of a growing schism among the members of the Government, welcome to a man strong in conscien-

tious opposition. Their political views were almost identical; and Philip was speaking with the quiet incisiveness and acute judgment of results involved, which always caused his late chief the most intimate satisfaction, when he paused suddenly, and made an involuntary movement as though he would have withdrawn his arm from his companion. Lord Sainsbury looked up quickly for an explanation.

It was not very far to seek. Following the direction of Philip's eyes, he saw that Sir Walter Earle with Honor Aylmer on his arm had just entered the park from the lower Piccadilly end, and were advancing along the path, evidently prepared to greet them with every sign of cordiality.

Escape was impossible; and yet the glance which Lord Sainsbury had cast into Philip's changed and set face convinced him of his absolute reluctance for the inevitable encounter, and moved him to give what help was in his power by taking the initiative upon himself.

So, withdrawing his arm from his companion's without the least hint of comprehension, he took a few steps in advance to meet Honor, and to encounter the first animated overflow of the baronet's greetings.

"Well met!" cried Sir Walter, cheerily. "I never saw your lordship look in better health and spirits; and I am delighted at the chance of meeting Methuen again and being able to offer him at last my congratulations on his marriage. All is fair in love and war," he added in a lower tone, grasping Philip's extended hand with great cordiality; "and I am quite prepared, if you will allow me, to call on Lady Methuen and wish her joy."

"Anna will take it both as an honor and a kindness."

Methuen succeeded in saying these words with a perfectly conventional manner; but there was a further duty required of him, which needed a harder effort to fulfil. The unexpected sight of Honor, and the instant impression he had received that she looked thinner and paler than of old, taxed his self-control to the uttermost; but the involuntary tension of his gaze, and the growing look of pain in his eyes beyond his power to efface, were an appeal to which the tender and stricken woman hastened to respond.

"Sir Walter only speaks of himself," she said, smiling; "but Miss Earle and I shall be just as pleased to be friends with Anna if she will let us. Our stay in town

will be very short this season. We are only just arrived, or I suppose we should have met before, and we soon go home again. Oliver is not so well."

Lord Sainsbury, who had immediately engaged Sir Walter Earle in conversation on the subject which their meeting had interrupted, now slipped his arm through the baronet's, and prepared to retrace his steps in the direction in which the other appeared to have been going, so as to leave Honor and Methuen at liberty to fall behind.

It was a consideration for which his friend did not thank him.

It may be thought that Methuen's creed was a narrow one, for it ordered simply this—to turn his back on the temptation which he feared. After the first inevitable gaze at meeting, he had averted his eyes from her. It was necessary to walk by her side; but he did so looking straight before him, and with the consciousness, quickening with every breath he drew, that the mere sound of her voice had stirred to their depths the remorse and despair of the future, which were as profound as on that day of separation.

This man's love had not been one passion among many—a little stronger and purer than the rest—but the very breath and essence of his manhood. To be thus brought face to face with Honor was to have the vision thrust upon him from which it was his deliberate desire to escape—that of the heaven he had lost and the hell to which he was condemned.

Some attempt at speech, however, was imperative; and as soon as he could trust his voice he said, falling back upon her last words:

"You mentioned Oliver. He is not seriously ill, I hope?"

"He has been worse than I ever remember to have known him," was the answer. "His life is increasingly hard to bear, and—he cannot bear it. The physicians, too, give us no hope of improvement."

"And you?—forgive me this once—I thought you looked ill. I pray God, Honor, that it is because you have been suffering with him?"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "it is just that; and Miss Earle insisted on bringing me up to town for a month."

She forbore to call him by his name, or to ask him any questions. Indeed, all that her tender heart yearned to

know she had read in his face and voice, and her own quiet hopeless misery which she thought she had reduced to submission, stirred and quickened with a convulsive life.

He did not break the silence which had again fallen between them for several minutes, then he said:

"You spoke just now of being friends with Anna; but, understand once more, the thing is impossible. Promise me that you will not make the attempt—out of mistaken generosity."

"I promise whatever you wish; but—you must let me take advantage of this opportunity!—I believe we might meet without harm, and strengthen and console each other."

"You might so meet," he said, abruptly—"not I!"

Then perceiving that Lord Sainsbury and his companion, who were some way in advance, had stopped as if to take leave of each other, he added quickly:

"Do not form wrong conclusions because I have behaved like a churl and a coward this morning. The shock of seeing you took me so utterly unawares. I want you to know that time has done something for me—that there are alleviations in my life. I am able to take pleasure in work once more. Anna—Anna behaves well and suspects nothing. I believe she is happy."

Here he looked at her; his reluctant gaze devouring the pale, lovely, pathetic face.

"You are not really ill?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper: "tell me I am not so miserable as to have been able to hurt your health!"

"No, no," she answered eagerly; "I have been quite well until lately. I am only a little fagged with anxiety about Oliver. Don't be angry with me if I say the sight of you has done me good. I can see in your face—Philip—that you are strong and brave, as I dared to tell you you would be. I thank God it is so! It is the one thing which makes my heart sing a little for joy."

Their eyes met: hers, woman-like, shining through tears of tender reverence, his softened to an expression of poignant sweetness, to which his face had long been a stranger.

"Then I am glad we met," he said, and took her hand in formal leave-taking, for the others were close upon them by this time.

"When may I tell Anna you will do her the honor to

call?" he asked of Sir Walter, with a perfect recovery of his usual manner.

"To-morrow, if you like. I will come and ask her for a cup of afternoon tea, since I perceive, Methuen, you have no intention to ask me to dine."

"No guest can be more welcome to either of us," said Philip, smiling; "come to-morrow and dictate your own conditions."

When they were gone, he turned back to Lord Sainsbury's side, taking up the conversation, after his wont, at the precise point where it had been interrupted; but the other did not intend to be put off.

"It hardly seems worth while, Methuen, to keep up the pretence of indifference with me, I like you well enough, but I should like you better if you would draw oftener on the sympathy of your friends."

"That is a reproach which Lord Sainsbury should be the last man to make to me. It is not long since I came to you telling you frankly the story of my trouble and asking for help. You helped me generously, even to the extent of leaving your retirement sooner on my account."

"And does it not strike you that this is all the stronger reason why you should trust me now, when I see with my own eyes what must be still more obvious to yours? It is not only your own life which has been spoiled—Miss Aylmer is very much altered."

Philip did not speak directly. "If this be so," he said after a little, "sympathy can only take the form of silence, for there is nothing to be done. Words waste strength. I want all I have to walk straight and live my life decently. What has happened this morning will not make things easier, nor would it do so to talk them over with you. Your kindness would not help, but hinder me. Forgive me if I seem ungrateful."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes; then Sainsbury said:

"Things are evidently drifting toward a renewal of intercourse between the families,—will that help or hinder your happiness, Methuen?"

"They must not so drift," was the answer. "There is no question of happiness concerned—it would be the ruin of peace and honor on all sides." They had turned into Waterloo Place, and were now just opposite the Travellers' Club. Philip stopped.

"I think your lordship said you were going in here this morning, and I will ask leave to wish you good-morning. Frankly, I shall be glad to be alone."

CHAPTER XXX.

"Who is it that says most? which can say more
Than this rich praise—that you alone are you?"

.
You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
Being fond on praise, which makes your praises worse."

—SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnets*.

ON the same morning that this meeting had occurred, Adrian Earle called on Lady Methuen in Gloucester Place. Anna welcomed him with a cordiality which at once flattered and provoked him.

"It is odd," he said, as he let go the hand she extended, "that you never knew how to be civil to me till civility was of no value. Why are you so pleased to see me?"

"I want you to go with me to South Audley Street and speak the final word about the arabesques for the drawing-room ceiling. They are pretty, but impoverished-looking—indeed that is what they are! I have discovered a young Italian genius who has sent me some perfect designs for centres and angles—scenes from the 'Decameron'—but Philip says we cannot afford them. I thought when I was Lady Methuen I had heard the last of that detestable formula."

"Ah!" said Adrian in a low, suggestive voice, "we are always a little behind our expectations." He threw himself into a low lounging-chair, clasping his hands behind his head in a favorite attitude, and looked up at Anna with an expression of fine raillery.

His morning dress was perfection; a glance showed that the art of physical personal cultivation had been carried to the highest point. There was an extreme delicacy and refinement conveyed by every feature and limb, every turn of expression and of movement. The thought came into Anna's mind that he was a great deal more attractive now than in the days before her marriage, and her face flushed a little.

"I think I can read Lady Methuen's thought," he re-

sumed, still speaking with the same slightly ironical inflection. "She is speculating whether, if she had married the humblest of her humble servants, his income would have been adequate to 'Decameron' episodes on her drawing-room ceiling."

Anna's color deepened. Love cannot exist without some sense of loyalty to its object, and daily contact with virtue breeds discrimination.

"You ought not to say such a thing as that; not that it really offends me, but I feel that it ought to offend me. I had no such thought; though now you mention it, I do wish Philip were as rich as you. How much do you think a man ought to spend in charity?"

"Personally, I am quite content with the law as my almoner, and what little adroit mendicancy extorts from my pockets; but I can believe it possible that a man like Methuen, who is tied hand and foot by the notion of religious obligation, may give a *tithe* of all he possesses."

"Ah!" she cried eagerly, "and you look upon that, of course, as the *ne plus ultra* of religious fanaticism? Well, you are both right and wrong. That is what Philip gives, and counts it—nothing! He says *that* is a debt, and charity only begins after it is paid."

Adrian slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, though you will tell me again I ought not to say it, I think you have every right to consider yourself ill-used. You will remember, Anna, that you told me in Rome you did so consider yourself."

"Yes," she said, "I told you so, but it was not true; or, if true, then it is not so now, and never was in the sense that you would understand it." And then, after a pause—"I thought you and he used to be good friends?"

"We drew together pretty well before he went to India—never since his return." He hesitated and added—"Besides, no friendship could stand up against wrongs as great as one man can receive from another. But on this subject it is forbidden me to speak."

"Is it? I don't in the least understand. You need not mind saying what you mean to me; I am very tolerant of wrong-doing. It may sound odd, but I should really be almost glad to know that Philip had behaved badly in some way or another! Can't you understand how irksome it is to live with a person who is always in the right, especially," she added in a lower tone, "when he

has no difficulty in proving that you are always in the wrong?"

Adrian got up and sauntered to the window. He could not trust himself to look into her face. He had seen the sudden suffusion of her eyes, and heard the vibration of sensibility in her voice, and was moved by them to an indignant and passionate sympathy. He said to himself (as all men say in the same circumstances), that if she had been happy he could have been content; but the knowledge that Anna Methuen was suffering from the indifference and neglect of the man who had taken her from himself, and was wasting with conscious pain the ardent tenderness he would have given years out of his life to obtain, was too hard to bear in silence and patience.

He was not perfectly acquainted with the circumstances which had led to their marriage; but the gossip of the neighborhood could not be shut out from his ears, and he had a general impression that there had been indiscretion on the one side, and sacrifice more or less on the other. He had also naturally questioned the members of his own family, but, with the exception of Oliver, they had preserved an honorable silence. From the latter, however, he learned enough to acquit Methuen, however unwillingly, of deliberate duplicity toward himself. At the same time (so difficult is it for either man or woman to estimate fairly the claims of the human creature whom they love), Adrian argued that the personal sacrifice in marrying a beautiful girl who had betrayed the secret of her love could not have been very great, and, anyway, the man who undertook it was bound to render her happy. To himself Anna was still now, as before, the great prize of life—lost, indeed, but none the less precious on that account—and her unhappiness and discontent touched him more closely than his own.

"Do you remember," he said, coming back to her after he had recovered his firmness, "that I once told you that if ever the time came when you wanted help and comfort, you would find me ready to give it? If there is anything I can do, put me to the proof, Anna."

He was half amused and half mortified at her answer. The rare mood of sensibility was over, and the intrinsic selfishness of her character reasserted itself.

"Help me to get this thing done as I wish. Yester-

day Lady Andrew Pattison went through the house with me, and I told her what I had planned, and that Philip would not consent. In her bold way—you know her, I suppose, like all the rest of the world?—she laughed to scorn the notion of my subserviency to his will and pleasure. ‘Give the order, my dear, and take the consequences,’ she said, ‘or else you may write yourself down *slave* for life.’ But I am a coward after all; I don’t dare to do that. I am afraid of Philip.”

The color came into Adrian’s face.

“The thing could easily be managed,” he said. “I have given you no wedding present, Anna, and this is but a trifle! Order your painter to do his best, and”—he looked at her eager face to see how far he might venture, and added quietly—“send me the bill.”

“Without telling Philip?”

He smiled in spite of himself at the bluntness of her perceptions: it was a little shock even to his infatuation; only with that eager wistful look in her eyes, how beautiful she was! Through life Anna had always accepted gifts as a prince accepts his dues.

“Tell Philip that your *protégé* has consented to paint your ceiling for the honor of the thing, at the same price as the arabesques would have cost, and—arrange with the man accordingly. I need not say my name is not to appear. You will pay the difference out of your pin-money.”

Anna reflected. “If no one ever found it out, I would not mind; for you are very rich, and will not miss it, and I shall have to live a great part of my life in that room; only Philip is not easily deceived. He seems to know what everything is worth; he would never believe that the man would do such good work for so little money.”

“Not if the artist told him so himself?” he asked, significantly.

She colored. “I will think about it and let you know;” and then the wistful, preoccupied look grew less concentrated, and she turned away from him and approached the window.

The sight of Adrian’s groom leading his master’s horse up and down before the house suggested to her mind a new train of thought.

“How delightful it would be,” she said, turning round with great animation, “for you and me to ride together

in the park! Is there any reason why we should not? I can get my horse brought round from the livery stables in ten minutes"—crossing the room and putting her hand upon the bell—"that is, if you have no better engagement. Philip is with Lord Sainsbury, and will not be home to luncheon. Let us go! it will be like old times again."

Of course he assented, and Anna, moved by some inexplicable coquetry, exerted herself to please him as she had never done before. She talked continually of Earlescourt, as if the happiest days in her life had been spent there, and offered him the subtle flattery of recalling things he had done and words that he had spoken in the far-away past.

Then she looked to superb advantage on horseback: men turned back to look at her, not only because she was beautiful, but that she seemed to radiate vigor and health like some youthful goddess.

Adrian could have wished that she had known fewer people, and not responded so freely to the recognition of her friends. He was scarcely willing as yet that their names should be mentioned together.

Among those who accosted Anna was a well-preserved, handsome woman, with the bold, direct gaze and perfect *aplomb* which indicate a comfortable assurance of recognized social standing. She was riding a thorough-bred mare, groomed to the highest point of perfection, and the servant in attendance was mounted on one of the showiest cobs in the row. She stared hard at Adrian, and then said, with the matchless effrontery of the modern woman of fashion:

"Introduce me to your cavalier, my dear. It is quite refreshing to see you attended by some one else than your husband. Personally, I adore Sir Philip Methuen, but I applaud every effort in the direction of conjugal independence."

Anna named Adrian without the slightest hesitation, saying a little spitefully:

"But I thought Lady Andrew Pattison knew all the world?"

"No doubt," interposed Adrian; "therefore the conclusion is that I have been out of the world."

Lady Andrew regarded him attentively.

"I know your father," she said; "but there are no young men like him. I never remember to have seen

you before; you must have been in hiding or going round the world, as they all do nowadays. Every one I meet bores me about Japan."

"I can undertake to bore you," said Adrian, "without going so far afield."

She gave him a bright look and nod of encouragement.

"Come," she exclaimed, "we shall be good friends; but we must not stand here any longer—my mare objects to have her haunches constantly jostled. It is marvellous how few people can steer clear even of so pronounced an impediment as myself."

They walked their horses leisurely the full length of the Row, Lady Andrew Pattison not only taking the lead in conversation, but ignoring or overwhelming Anna's attempts at participation. As regarded Adrian, she simply took possession of him, eliciting his opinions and taking his measure while offering him perfumed doses of ingenious flattery.

Anna, who never willingly submitted to the *rôle* of spectator or subordinate, broke in with a certain defiant unconventionality, saying it was time for her to return home, and they would bid Lady Andrew "Good-morning."

"We will turn at once," was the answer. "It shall never be said that it was my fault that Lady Methuen neglected her domestic duties. By the way, have you thought twice about the matter we were discussing yesterday, and made up your mind to give little Farini the chance of winning himself immortality?"

There was a latent sarcasm in the tone which brought the angry color into Anna's face. The speaker was evidently prepared for a negative.

"I think that may possibly be the conclusion I shall reach," she said coldly, "only, I mean to submit his designs to a little closer investigation. Some of them struck me as——" She hesitated and blushed.

"As—as—having a *soupçon* of impropriety?" laughed the other. "My dear, that simply means they are relieved from absolute insipidity; but I frankly own I am out of my reckoning. I did not think *lo spóso* would yield to the pressure applied. No conquest, I see, lies beyond your bright eyes. It will be the prettiest room outside Belgravia. Ta, ta, *ma belle*."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I would I could adopt your will
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs,—your part, my part
In life, for good and ill."

—R. BROWNING.

SIR WALTER EARLE paid his congratulatory visit to Lady Methuen as he had promised, and made several observations.

He had always, as men do when not subjected to their influence, condoned Anna's faults of character and temper on the score of her beauty, and he perceived that the development of that beauty even went beyond the promise of her girlhood. Had her manners been as captivating as her person, he said to himself, she would have been simply irresistible. But Anna, unless bent on being gracious, was too scornfully indifferent, too socially negligent to please.

Society abhors egotism, and demands at least the appearance of unselfishness, and Anna's self-seeking was rarely in abeyance. It is true she did her best to win the good-will of Sir Walter Earle; and the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes, the inflection of grateful welcome in her voice, and the marked deference she showed him in a room full of people, did please him effectually.

He responded frankly to her cordiality, and expressed a hope that the coolness now subsisting between the two families might soon be got over.

"Adrian," he said, smiling, "must do as better men have done before him—make friends with the woman who would not have him as a husband. We cannot give up our neighbors to please him."

Some indefinable reserve prevented Anna from saying that Adrian had already proved that he found no difficulty in this matter; it was quite evident to her quick perception that Sir Walter did not know that they had met.

"It is not Adrian that I am afraid of," she answered, in her low, seductive voice. "There has been plenty of time for him to forget such an insignificant creature as myself; but will Miss Earle and Honor forgive me?"

Her glance and accent turned Sir Walter Earle into her advocate.

That same day after dinner, as soon as the cloth and servants were withdrawn, he opened the subject with his sister, telling her where he had been, and asking if she could not be induced to forgive the slight Anna had put upon her nephew, and offer her the civility of a call and invitation to dinner.

Miss Earle looked up sharply: it needed a mental effort to recall the difference between the real facts of the case and her brother's partial knowledge of them.

"It strikes me as a little inconsistent," continued Sir Walter, "that you should bear the girl so much ill-will, Bella, when the step she took in Adrian's little affair was the only one that would have pleased you."

Miss Earle reddened, and glanced toward Honor. To see the color fading from that dear face, and the veiled look of pain in her eyes, hardened her heart against Anna Methuen. Evidently she was averse to any renewed intercourse with the Methuens. How, indeed, could she, with any regard to dignity and peace of mind, meet the man who had sacrificed her to the shameless exigence of another woman?

It had always seemed to Miss Earle's robust good sense that it would have been better that the truth had been generally known, at least to Anna herself and the members of their own family; but she had yielded the point to the urgent representations of the girl whom she considered to have been so cruelly wronged, and whose love, after the interval of all these months, seemed neither to have waxed nor waned. Honor still held by her inflexible belief in Methuen's worth, which had irked and irritated Miss Earle all along. But the necessity of keeping the secret to which she was pledged made her say:

"I do not quarrel with Anna because she rejected Adrian—that is the one point in her favor—but because I never liked her, and was wearied and disgusted by her selfishness and arrogance when she was our guest last year."

"Oh, my dear, you may feel sure that Lady Methuen will be better behaved than Anna Trevelyan. We can never, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' have them living at Methuen Place as strangers. The neighbors will talk. Also, you seem to have forgotten how valuable Methuen's kindness was to our poor Oliver."

"I admit that as an argument," said Miss Earle, with an impatient sigh; "but I am not at all sure they would be such good friends in the future. You know you all liked Philip Methuen a great deal better than I."

"I am prepared to own he is a man who has disappointed me a little," was Sir Walter's answer. "He is evidently not going to make the figure in the world I expected, though I learn there is still a chance of getting him into Parliament under the Norfolk patronage, only they must make haste about it. Honor would tell you that we met him and Sainsbury in the park yesterday. He struck me as very much altered."

Miss Earle cast a swift glance of grieved surprise upon Honor, but she answered loyally, without the hesitation of a moment: "Since yesterday morning we have been in such a whirl of petty engagements that we have not had the chance of five minutes' private conversation. We will discuss this matter, Honor and I, at our ease presently, for we are rejoicing in a quiet evening at home; but are you quite sure it would be well advised to expose Adrian to Lady Methuen's influence?"

Sir Walter lifted his eyebrows.

"He must take his chance about that. If he does not meet her in this house he will meet her elsewhere. He is a little too old to be kept in leading-strings."

As soon as the two women were alone together, Miss Earle turned her grave, reproachful face full upon Honor.

"Is this man to come between us and rob me even of your trust?" she asked. "Why did you not tell me of this?"

"Why?" repeated Honor; "why?"—and there was an accent almost of despair in her voice—"because I thought I would be brave, and try and keep my misery to myself; but—I should have told you. It is too strong for me after all."

She went up to Miss Earle with a look in her eyes such as the latter scarcely remembered to have seen in them even on the day of that terrible separation, and then suddenly bowed her face upon her shoulder.

"What will you think of me?" she said. "After all—this long time—when I believed the worst was over—I am not sure I shall be able to go on—living my life."

The voice was sharp with the poignant accent of pain; the figure round which the other had thrown her

arm was shaken with sobs—not the facile hysteria of an emotional woman, but those which tell of the breaking up of fountains hitherto rigidly sealed.

Miss Earle's keen, delicate face changed and quivered. She found it hard not to weep, too, with this girl whom she loved so fondly; but she controlled herself, and stood for a few moments quite silent, and stroking with ineffable tenderness the head bowed on her neck.

"My darling," she whispered fondly, "I was always afraid how it would be when you met. God forgive me, but I could curse this man."

"Him!" said Honor, with a sort of dull surprise—"him! He is cursed already. I—I never hated her until yesterday."

She lifted up her face as she spoke, and Miss Earle saw, with almost a shock of surprise, how pale and stern it was.

"Did he complain of his wife?" she asked, with a sneer. "Did he dare to refer to your past relations?"

"He did not complain of her. He said she behaved well and was happy, and that he was able to take pleasure in his daily work. But I—I offered to be friends with Anna, and besought him to let us meet sometimes. He refused."

"And am I then to understand, my poor child, that you have looked forward to a renewal of intercourse with the Methuens? Could you endure it?"

"I could not only endure it," was her answer, "but I do not think I can endure to give up the idea. Sometimes to see him, so that I can judge for myself whether his life is bearable—or, at least, how he bears it—is necessary to help me to bear my own. You—mother! more almost than that—you will believe that I could do this without injuring—Anna, I was going to say, but I will say without wronging my own self or him by a single thought?"

"My dear, it would be harder than you think—at least for him."

"So he said; but I have thought the matter out, and—he must be convinced that he is wrong. Picture him shut up in Methuen Place—with her—which is so full of cruel memories for him. Chief of all, the memories of the old uncle he loved so much, and who died happy, thinking he had made his happiness sure. That thought alone must be terrible to bear and *hide*."

"Honor, these fine agonies don't pierce men's hearts like ours; he will have his outlets. Also, he has married a very beautiful woman: she has probably consoled him by this time."

"Ah!" said Honor, "that does not touch me. I only wish she had, and I would forgive her everything. If Anna could make Philip happy, God knows I would rejoice and be glad; you should not hear a word of complaint or regret from me then."

Miss Earle was silent, stroking delicately the hand she held.

"Tell me, dear, what passed between you, if you can, that has so opened up the flood-gates of your grief. My pet! I had thought you were beginning to be content."

"I think I was cheating my own soul by telling myself he would forget me and be happy. What passed? Very little; only he looked as if the fight had been—harder even than I feared—very much altered, as Sir Walter puts it; and he looked at me and spoke to me simply under compulsion. That is," dropping her voice, "I saw that he could scarcely bear it."

"And your logical conclusion is that it would do him good to be forced to bear it?"

"I think that if he could be induced to bear it until it ceased to be painful—if he could take up his old relations with us all—be Adrian's friend again, and kind and helpful as in the days gone by—it would be better for him. You see," she went on persuasively, "he is too much alone, concentrating his strength on one point only—doing his daily duty without ease or distraction. Don't you understand, dear?"

"I understand quite well that you are of the same mind as Sir Walter; you wish me to be civil to his wife, and open our doors to her again. You would like to call upon Lady Methuen to-morrow, and invite them to our next Tuesday's dinner? My child, he would decline."

"No doubt he would decline; but it would be a breaking of the ice, and when we are all at home again, things might fall into the old groove. If you love me, let us put it to the proof."

Miss Earle knitted her delicate brows.

"And have you nothing to fear from Anna's jealousy? You will be complicating the troubles of this man if you excite that girl's suspicions."

"Can you not trust me?" she asked. "Of him I am sure. Besides, her suspicions would surely be aroused if we all stood aloof from her."

"I am not convinced, Honor. I think you are setting yourself a task beyond your strength; but you shall have your own way in the matter."

Two days after this conversation, when Methuen entered his wife's drawing-room at the hour of five o'clock tea, Anna said, as she handed him a cup:

"You have just missed some old friends. Miss Earle and Honor Aylmer have been here."

She looked at him steadily as she spoke, but in his intercourse with his wife Philip seldom put off his armor. In spite of the secret spasm of painful surprise, he answered without embarrassment or hesitation:

"Then I am to understand that we are to accept the visit as a formal offering of the olive-branch? Ah, Lady Andrew Pattison, I beg your pardon. I did not see you for the moment. Anna excludes the light almost too rigorously."

The lady in question was standing in one of the deep recesses of the window, gazing out into the street. She had risen from her chair in order to command a better survey of the Earle equipage, which she had been criticising to her hostess with her usual air of arrogant finality, and the folds of the heavy curtain had concealed her figure.

"Oh, I excuse you readily," she answered, "being accustomed to be overlooked wherever Lady Methuen is present, who has, we all know, no greater admirer than her husband."

She fixed her bold black eyes on his face as she spoke, with a smile of doubtful suggestion, and then added:

"I think myself fortunate to have met Miss Aylmer here to-day, for although much talked of—as heiresses mostly are—she is seldom seen. It has given me the opportunity of correcting an erroneous impression. I thought, Sir Philip, you men reputed her to be a beauty?"

"I suppose there are few men," he answered, "who know less of such social estimates than I. I have never till this moment heard Miss Aylmer's beauty canvassed; and those who, like ourselves, have the honor of being her friends, are scarcely likely to be fair judges. At least," turning toward his wife, "Anna and I think her beautiful."

His smile and manner had so much of the old winning sweetness, that it checked the words that had risen to Anna's tongue. Lady Andrew continued to observe him with a peculiar expression on her face.

"Ah," she said, "I beg pardon. I did not know I trod on sacred ground. The relations of the families, then, have been more intimate than I even suspected?"

"It is a subject quite undeserving the exercise of Lady Andrew Pattison's suspicions. The facts themselves are entirely at her service. The Earle's were our earliest and best friends when Anna and I first came to live in England."

"Really! I should never have gathered that from what passed just now. I thought their cordiality a little forced, though I own I never saw Lady Methuen more effusive. It is easy to see she shares your estimate of the beautiful Miss Aylmer."

It would be a little difficult to explain the motives which actuated Lady Andrew Pattison in her relations with the Methuens; but her instinct was certainly inimical to their conjugal peace. Anna's insolent confidence in her own beauty, and obvious disparagement of other women, herself included, had something to do with it, added to a certain fascination which Methuen possessed for her, and to the indications of which he had shown the most absolute unconsciousness. Her acuteness, too, had detected a certain want of spontaneity in the unfailing kindness of the husband to the wife, which provoked the curiosity and speculation of the idle woman of fashion.

Her last words had brought the angry color into Anna's cheek, and a smile of gratification at her own successful *coup* parted her lips.

"The girl rises like trout to the fly," she said to herself, as she marked the haughty uplifting of her beautiful head; but again, and most unexpectedly, Anna held her peace, checking the eager disclaimer which had sprung to her lips, and checking it only because Philip was looking at her so kindly.

"If it were not even worse taste for a man to praise his wife than himself," he said, smiling, "I should be inclined to answer that Anna is fortified by nature against any jealousy of other women. Also, you must forgive my repeating that Miss Aylmer is too much our friend to admit of disinterested criticism."

Lady Andrew Pattison colored. "I shall take care not to offend in the future," she said. "I see Lady Methuen has already learned the same lesson. She is dissentient, but wisely keeps her opinions to herself. Odd, isn't it, that husbands and wives never think alike about the same people?"

"Your ladyship's experience is so much fuller than mine," returned Philip, "that I will not venture to dispute the assertion, though my own crude notion was that daily intercourse tended to accommodation of sentiment."

She laughed a little, and turning toward the pier-glass, near which she was standing, began coolly to arrange her hat and veil prior to departure.

"You pick your words with discrimination, Sir Philip; accommodation is an elastic phrase." Then addressing Anna:

"He was too well advised, my dear Lady Methuen, to speak of agreement. Nine months serve as well as nine years to dispel certain illusions."

Anna shrugged her shoulders, and affected to stifle a yawn.

"I am not good at that kind of talk," she said. "I detest innuendo. Philip and I had no illusions to begin with."

"You mean that antagonism was clearly understood from the first?" asked the other, with an innocent air.

Anna's eyes flashed. "I mean, that I always loved my husband—now as well as then—that there was no question of illusion in the matter."

She stretched out her hand toward him as she spoke, with her grand air, and Philip, meeting boldly Lady Andrew Pattison's keen glance of investigation, bowed low over it, and put it to his lips.

"'Tis like a scene in a French play," was her rejoinder, "and I feel myself rebuked for the second time to-day—by the wife as by the husband. But I see my carriage is at your door once more, and there is a droop about old Sutton's shoulders which means sullen despair, and reminds me of the unconscionable time I have stayed. *Au revoir, ma belle,*" touching Anna's cheek caressingly with her glove; "and rely on my holding myself at your disposal in regard to the Farini designs. Send for me any hour of the day or night."

Anna's response was indifferent to the verge of inci-

vility, and as if in defiance of her guest's cynicism, she said to Philip, who was going to see her to her carriage:

"Come back again, please, as soon as you can—I have something to say to you."

He came back as desired, but hesitated for a few moments before entering the room. He dreaded what his wife was going to tell him, for it probably bore upon her renewed intercourse with the Earle family.

He had an increasing sense of the difficulty and discrepancy of their position. He was married to a woman who adored him, and he could not love her. Had he then no magnanimity?—no real faculty of self-mastery?

Since he and Honor had met a week ago, the craving of his heart, which had been held down by remorseless pressure, with righteous purpose to stamp it out, had quickened into the old vitality. The pain he felt was as sharp almost as in that first hour of separation. Persistent practice seemed to make duty no easier.

To recall the sweetness of her face as he had lately seen it, the tenderness of her voice, the divine unselfishness of her behavior, was to feel that more was required of him than he could bear.

They must not meet.

The desire to take her once more into his arms, and kiss the pure pathetic lips and the eyes shining with unshed tears—to try and console her for the irremediable sorrow he had cost her—would consume his life.

He vaguely wondered if other men loved other women as he loved Honor Aylmer. Not beautiful! Anyway, no other of God's creatures was so formed to meet the most subtle and intimate requirements of his being. He had told her that, so long as he drew the breath of life, no other love would touch him. It was just as true at that moment as when the words first left his lips: he had no power to change.

He heard a movement in the room within, as if Anna had risen and was approaching the door.

Could he go in and talk to her? Was not his life an ignominy and a lie? And if it were, was it his doing that honor and integrity had been out of his reach? And this was the outcome of the long training of his youth—of the holy ambition and sacred dreams of his early manhood. This!

"God! I grope in the dark," he said inwardly; "but I did not choose darkness."

He opened the door and went in.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones till I sink to the minor—yes."

—ABT VOLGER.

ANNA had seated herself in a low lounging-chair, with a careful adjustment of her picturesque tea-gown. She was fanning herself with a languid, imperial air peculiarly her own, and with a sense of profound personal satisfaction. She had just enjoyed one of the dearest triumphs of her life; the recognition of her position as Lady Methuen by the friends who had known her in her former state of insignificance and dependence; and she was pleasing herself with the prospect of future indemnification.

There was a little mirror fixed in the stick of her fan, and as she slowly moved it to and fro she studied the reflection of her face with a smile of intense conviction.

Her claims to admiration, unlike those of other women, did not admit of canvass. She was as beautiful as a Greek statue, if such a statue could have been raised to her level by having the warm wave of vigorous life sent flowing through its perfect form.

The expression of her eyes as she looked up at her husband's entrance puzzled him. They shone with the softened light of caressing self-gratulation.

"I am so happy," she said, "so happy! I think I have got now all I want. Are not you glad of what has happened? You see I was right! I knew they would come round sooner or later. Why shouldn't they, for none of them wished me to marry Adrian?"

"Yes," he said; "I allow you judged better than I."

She looked toward him sharply. "You are not glad! I don't understand. Earlescourt used to be more to you than to me. What has changed you, Philip?"

"I am not changed. Earlescourt is to me what it always was, only I cannot get over as easily as you seem to do the awkwardness of future intercourse with Adrian Earle. You have spoiled our friendship, Anna."

"Do you regret it?" she asked, with an inflection in her voice, and an expression of eye and lip that would

have drawn any other man to her feet; and that he was impervious to the charm, and still kept his eyes on a book which he had carelessly taken up from the table, cut her heart with equal pain and anger. "At any rate," she resumed, "you will have to get over the awkwardness. I have accepted their invitation to dinner for next Tuesday."

"I am engaged," he answered, with a certain eagerness. "You will have to write and explain."

Her vexation was so great that her temper mastered the discretion she had learned to employ in their daily intercourse.

"I do not believe you," she said sharply; "you have a standing engagement to thwart my wishes."

He shut up the book, and came nearer to her.

"That is a breach of good manners, Anna, which you must not commit again. You can easily satisfy yourself that I speak the truth. The Indian Budget is fixed for Tuesday, and I have promised Lord Sainsbury to be in the House."

She fanned herself deliberately, keeping her eyes fixed on his face.

"Are you ill," she asked, "or only angry, that you look so pale? I would much rather you went into a passion. It is of no great consequence, after all. Miss Earle said Tuesday week would do, if you happened to have an engagement. But perhaps the Indian debate will be adjourned?"

He paused, weighing with swift precision the for and against.

"I will go on Tuesday week," was the answer. He recognized the impossibility of further resistance. Events must take their course.

"You have made me quite happy," said Anna, with a full return of her conciliatory manner; for she lacked the fine sense of proportion, and had no remembrance of the hurt or outrage she had inflicted, so soon as it suited her own interest or pleasure to forget it.

She rose as she spoke, and going up to him, slipped her beautiful arm, from which her loose sleeve fell back, about his neck and kissed him.

"Miss Earle told me Sir Walter had said you were very much altered; but I think you are more like Donatello's St. George than ever—only more beautiful."

She spoke, leaning against him, in a caressing whis-

per, and it was as much as he could do to check the instinct which prompted him to free himself from her encircling arms and the lingering pressure of her lips.

The sensuousness of her love revolted him. There were moments when he wished some sudden blight might fall upon the beauty that provoked it. Her endearments tried his patience more than any other portion of his daily discipline, every charm she possessed working upon his temperament to increased repugnance. He could have borne his forced union better had she been less lovely.

"I might have answered," continued Anna, "that you were not the only one who was altered. I think when you see Honor Aylmer again you will agree with Lady Andrew Pattison that she cannot be called beautiful. Once I was jealous of her; but that is past. I have gained where she has lost. I am glad—for your sake, Philip."

"There never was a time," he said, putting her gently away from him, "when you were not more beautiful than Honor Aylmer. Beauty includes your whole circle of perfection, Anna."

"Not quite; there must be room for pleasure to come in. Come! it is a delightful afternoon—drive with me in the Park for an hour. It does you good sometimes to contemplate the world, the flesh, and the devil on their rounds. More; Lady Andrew said her box at Covent Garden is at my disposal to-night. It is 'Fidelio,' and you like 'Fidelio.' Will you go? or must you lend your ears to Lord Sainsbury?"

He consented to go, thankful when the duty required of him took such practical definite forms, and giving Anna no reason to complain of the way in which he fulfilled his promise. So far as was possible, he adapted himself to her mood and temper, and accepted her observations and criticisms with as much kindly courtesy as if each word had not proved anew that they had neither thought nor feeling in common. Nor did he by any means omit the numerous *petits soins* which an indulged and beautiful woman is apt to exact from whatever man is in attendance.

Anna felt fairly content as she sat by his side in the brilliant theatre, for it was a renewed proof of her success in getting what she wanted. She was perfectly satisfied with herself, her husband, and her dress, not

to say with the general outlook of her position. During the course of the evening several men of their acquaintance came to their box to pay their respects to her, willing to prove the honor of knowing the most beautiful woman in the house; but it would have been impossible to have found cause of offence or jealousy in her behavior.

She took the civil things they said to her with the most absolute indifference—much as an idol in a shrine absorbs the incense offered. She would refer from what they said to her husband with an odd mingling of *naïveté* and insolence, which had a sort of provocative attraction, and was deprived of offence by the tact and courtesy with which Methuen met it.

During the days which followed upon the Earle's visit, it seemed to Anna that Philip had never shown himself more amiable, and again and again she referred to the reconciliation as an event which obviously gave him as much satisfaction as herself. Adrian seized upon the circumstance as giving social justification to the frequent visits he now paid to Gloucester Place, timing his calls at the hours when he pretty well knew Methuen would not be at home, and putting himself and his services entirely at Anna's command, more especially as regarded the work going on in the house in South Audley Street.

Partly through ignorance, but also partly through intention, Anna's additions and alterations were assuming formidable proportions. Comments dropped by Lady Andrew Pattison's acrid tongue, or languid criticisms and suggestions of Earle's, given without reflection, appealed so strongly to her mixed vanity and pride that she ruled her arrangements by them, with very little regard to the question of expense.

It happened unfortunately that Philip, having given his orders with distinct brevity to the men employed, and carefully demonstrated to his wife the necessity of keeping within certain limits, dismissed the details of the matter from his mind. He was well content for Anna to find interest and amusement in the furnishing of her house; to him it was a point of complete indifference.

He felt increasingly—and character and education combined to make the result inevitable—that weariness and disrelish of fashionable society and the bondage of uncongenial domestic ties, which he had professed long

years before to his uncle; and he availed himself, accordingly, of all work and interest which took him out of himself—the harder, even the more distasteful, the better.

He was almost as much Lord Sainsbury's secretary as when an official tie had bound them together, and many hours in the day were often passed under his roof. He excused his partial neglect of Anna, on the plea that the fundamental want of sympathy between them must make his society oppressive to her, and that she had so far established her position and won friends of her own, to say nothing of her renewed relations with the Earles, court ladies, as to make her independent of his constant companionship. No girl could go wrong who was associated with Honor Aylmer and Miss Earle, and with whom it was a matter of social necessity to preserve the good opinion of his patron's influential sister, Mrs. Auchester; nor, he said to himself, whatever her faults, was Anna a girl likely to go wrong?

He continued to regard Adrian's visits with reserved displeasure, though ignorant of their extreme frequency and the practical form that they took; but under the circumstances of general reconciliation, it was not impossible to put a veto upon them. Anna, he believed, ran no danger, and Earle was certainly beyond the power of his influence.

Also, the soreness of his own heart was such as to unfit him to play any intermediary part. It was as much as he could do to fulfil his own duty in life according to his notions of requirement, under the increasing exigency of circumstance.

The dinner in Arlington Street had been duly eaten and repeated, and the Earles had in their turn dined in Gloucester Place.

Philip, who had learnt a severe lesson from the weakness of which he considered himself to have been guilty in his first meeting with Honor in the Green Park, was fully master of himself before they met again.

It had been his fixed purpose to avoid intercourse, but that had been overruled, making the difficulty of preserving the sacred secret of his love infinitely greater but even more imperative than before. He had reached the conclusion that this was only to be done in one way—a way that many men would have found impossible, but which was not so to a man whose faculties of self-

repression and self-mastery had been trained and tested during long years of moral and spiritual discipline, and who viewed his life in the light of a daily sacrifice to God. It behoved him, he said to himself, to behave with the same cordial friendship toward Honor Aylmer as Anna had been accustomed to witness in the old days.

So complete was his success in carrying out this purpose as to become almost a source of embarrassment and distress to Honor herself. He neither sought nor avoided her society, but took the opportunity as it fell with so exact a simulation of his former manner of half-tender, half-respectful distance as made the girl thrill with a strange blending of pleasure and pain.

There was not a trace of the anguished avoidance which had pierced her soul at their first meeting; his eyes met hers and neither flinched nor softened; his voice took no different inflection when he spoke to her.

Also, unconsciously, he scored another victory. He won Miss Earle's reluctant favor—not, it must be owned, from any effort on his own part, but because she could not resist the feeling of approval and respect he excited in her mind by the equal perfection of his behavior to the two women who loved him.

In her secret cogitations, however, Miss Earle often sighed and shook her head over the situation. There was a look of pathetic wistfulness in Honor's eyes which touched her more than the forlorn sadness of the days just gone by; and whatever might be the results of this renewed intercourse on the stronger nature of the man, she felt quite sure that it tasked, as she had known that it must, the tender endurance of the woman.

At the end of July she succeeded in carrying Honor off with her for a long round of visits. Sir Walter and his son were to remain in town till the end of the session, and then to join them at a favorite country-house in the Highlands; the Methuens proposing to go home to Methuen Place immediately on the rising of Parliament.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Oh world, where all things pass and naught abide!
Oh life, the long mutation, is it so?
Is it with life as with the body's change?
Where e'en though better follow, good must pass, . . .
And though the new stays, never both at once."
—R. BROWNING.

THERE is no denying the fact that English country life draws heavily on physical and mental resources, and that when these are not present to meet the demand, the problem of how to make life worth living becomes a very serious one.

There are certain conditions under which country life is pleasant—when the ancestral home is full of the vitality, hope, and promise of a young family, and the parents, still in their first youth, find their hearts in responsive beat with the children's exuberant joy and keen zest in living. Life is full enough when it grows deeper and wider with every new existence, and there is little chance of weariness when we live over again in the ambitions and hopes of our boys and our girls, who are so pathetically confident of winning what we have missed, and of carrying through the purposes which we have been forced to forego.

And country life may also be sweet when there is enough sacred human love between husband and wife to gild the long summer days, and to brighten the sombre march of wintry hours. Where there is a sufficient community of intellect and taste to breed an intimate sympathy on points of importance, and enough of diversity to guard from insipidity a life-long intercourse. When also the outside world is looked upon as the adjunct of a happiness otherwise sufficient, not the forlorn hope of exhausted conjugal patience.

But it must be frankly conceded that neither Sir Philip nor Lady Methuen was qualified for its enjoyment.

Anna was profoundly disappointed that their return to the old family seat had nothing of the nature of a triumph. No peals from church bells welcomed home the bride and bridegroom, nor was there any gathering even of respectful tenantry or obsequious servants.

It is true old Austen himself came forward to open the

carriage-door, pushing the younger footman on one side; and Mrs. Gibson, in spotless kerchief and cap, stood awaiting them in the hall, looking as the housekeepers of Methuen Place had looked for generations past. Also, all the arrangements were as complete as willing hands and anxious hearts could make them.

But Anna's observation was right; there was no joy nor even cheerfulness to be perceived—the new mistress was an unwelcome guest.

When Philip, taking her hand, led her up to Mrs. Gibson, saying, "I have brought home my wife at last; I know you will serve her as faithfully as you have served all those who have borne our name," Anna threw up her head with a gesture of haughty impatience.

It was as much as she could do to check the words of anger and defiance which the old woman's aspect and manner excited. There was precisely the same hard, reluctant expression in her eyes when they fell upon her as had moved her hot displeasure in their last momentous interview.

She had been obliged to endure it then, as she was obliged to endure it now; but it only strengthened her purpose of future retaliation.

Her husband's solicitous kindness and air of almost affectionate regard irritated her only less than did the searching look which Mrs. Gibson dared to fasten upon her master's face.

Methuen, on his side, had been quite prepared for this vigilant scrutiny, springing from her intimate knowledge of the past, and prompted, as he well knew, by loyal devotion to himself, but it was by no means the easiest conquest he had made. There are perhaps few things harder to ignore or evade than the unexpressed sympathy of an inferior in possession of disagreeable facts.

Mrs. Gibson courtsied profoundly, instinctively responding to the quiet authority of Methuen's manner; but as Anna had not spoken, it was unnecessary for her to try her reluctant tongue at a welcome.

As soon as they were alone, even before she had taken off her travelling things—for Anna recognized no law of propriety or consideration where her passions were aroused—she turned to Philip and said, in the low suppressed voice which always marked her strongest excitement—

"Before we sit down to dinner, and begin our new life

in this old place, Lady Methuen has one request to make—a promise to get—from its master.

Philip waited. The pressure of the new life in the old place was already weighing upon his spirits. His present effort was to shut out the crowd of associations which every glance brought home to him with a poignancy which taught him that he had never estimated his sacrifice, nor fully tasted his martyrdom till this hour of coming home.

"You do not answer," she resumed, with sudden tears of passion in her eyes. "I can see that your heart toward me is cold as a stone; but—you are a gentleman, and—will not have your wife insulted."

"You may feel quite sure on that point, Anna."

"Then I demand," she said, with an imperious sweep of her hand, "that all these old servants shall be dismissed. They—they know the story of my marriage. I will not read that knowledge in their faces."

She met his quiet glance with defiant steadfastness, and spoke like one who has thrown down the glove and challenges the enemy to single combat.

"My dear Anna," he answered, there are few things which I would not do to allay such an apprehension as that—it cannot touch your self-respect more deeply than it touches mine. But it is not a question to discuss in the first moment of our return——"

She interrupted him eagerly.

"I will not dine nor sleep till it has been discussed. One word is all I want—say they shall go, and I am satisfied."

"Then, in one word, since you force me to a decision, I cannot say it. They have spent their lives in my uncle's service, and were commended by him to my care on his deathbed, and it is out of my power to dismiss them. If you will let them, they will love and serve you as faithfully as they have loved and served those who have passed away."

He spoke with an exquisite gentleness, as if to disarm her opposition; but she who listened to him was not to be won by any grace of manner when the substance of her desire was refused.

"That means that, although I am your wife, you take advantage of my friendlessness to deprive me of the authority which is my right. What do your pledges to the dead signify? You are bound by stronger ties to

the living. Do you mean that I am to endure the covert insolence of that old woman, who looks at me as if she begrudged me my position, and who will refuse me the respect to which I am entitled? Dismiss Mrs. Gibson, and I will waive the rest."

"Whenever you convince me she has failed in respect, Anna, Mrs. Gibson shall be dismissed; but bear a little with the innocent self-importance of a faithful, spoilt old servant. She was my first friend at Methuen Place."

He smiled as he spoke, and held out his hand to draw her toward him, and to kiss the angry sullen face; not indeed because he was moved by any impulse of affection, but rather by the reverse consciousness of an increasing alienation, and therefore she should not see how her words and actions moved him.

And Anna, who had never known from him, nor, indeed, seen displayed to others, anything beyond this deliberate measured kindness, accepted it as the best he was able to give, while rebelling against the passionate craving which seemed to grow with his coldness until it threatened to exhaust the freshness and gladness of her youth.

It was the strength of this conviction which gave such zest to her pursuit of social distraction; but society was, as we have said before, sparse and scattered in the Skeffington neighborhood, and when the chief of the county families had driven the necessary ten or twelve miles to pay their respects to the foreign wife of the half-foreign young baronet, and a single dinner had been exchanged, dreariness settled down upon the scene. Miss Earle and Honor were not at Earlescourt, and Mrs. Sylvestre, though she had called upon her niece and invited her to visit them at the Vicarage, distinctly refused to allow Dolly to be her cousin's guest at Methuen Place, fearing the pernicious influence of the master of the house.

Methuen, anxiously and promptly aware of the *ennui* from which his wife suffered, made some attempt to awaken her interest in books, or art, or music, for which latter pursuits she had considerable natural talent, but her objection was ready—

"I am too good a judge of excellence to pass my own drawings; and who would sing and play to you, Philip? I will listen."

"I have given up the piano," he said. "We will

build an organ-chamber when—when there is no better claim on the money.”

He himself was seeking out employment for his time with unrelenting solicitude. It was necessary to stamp out the recollections with which the gray old house was filled; the very atmosphere seemed charged with the eager, generous love of the fond old man who had gone down to the grave happy in the happiness he thought he had accomplished. Soon after his return, Methuen had naturally paid a visit to the room where Sir Giles had died, and had stood for a few moments gazing at the spot where he and Honor, kneeling side by side, had exchanged the vows and received the blessing which had shed a divine light in the very valley of the shadow of death; then, warned by the acuteness of the pang he suffered, even to the extent that a feeling of revolt stirred within his soul, he gave instructions to Mrs. Gibson that the room should be kept strictly locked in the future, and opened to no one's inspection but his own.

For the rest, he fulfilled Mrs. Sylvestre's worst apprehensions by having the little dilapidated private chapel put in thorough repair, and enriching it with the numerous treasures of art he had carefully collected for this purpose during his recent residence abroad.

Every step of the process was known at the vicarage—the decoration of the altar, with its costly draperies and still more costly accessories—the erection of the crucifix and the painting above it, the one a miracle of medieval art, the other a superb Assumption, said to be by Perugino, and to be worth a year's income—and the filling in of the fine old eastern window with ancient painted glass, on which the vicar himself gazed with unstinted admiration. Then followed the reconsecration of the now perfect chapel by no less a personage than Father Florentius himself, who remained a whole week the guest of the new master of Methuen Place; followed by a succession of services and a gathering of the few scattered members of the Roman communion in the vicinity, glad to avail themselves of the privileges for the first time offered within the memory of the present generation. All this involved the last straw of provocation—the institution of the domestic chaplain.

It was Mrs. Sylvestre herself who brought home this pregnant piece of news.

“I think, my dear,” she said, addressing the vicar

with a neater and sharper accentuation even than usual, as she raised the heavy family teapot at the afternoon meal (dexterously graduating the strength of the infusion according to the prerogative of the recipient—"I think you will now admit the wisdom of the course I have felt right to adopt in respect to Methuen Place. I thank God I have never been betrayed by my affection for Dolly into placing her in the way of temptation!")

"My feeling was," replied the vicar, a little impatiently, "that Dolly would have got no harm there. Anna, unfortunately, has no religion worth speaking of, and Methuen would scrupulously have avoided the subject. He does his best to gather his own sheep into the fold, but he has never shown any disposition to make proselytes."

"What, may I ask, do you call the rebuilding and embellishment of his private chapel for daily idolatrous worship, to which all outsiders are welcomed; and the introduction of a full-blown Jesuit priest into his household?" (Mrs. Sylvestre recognized but one order in the Roman communion.) "You will find fewer worshippers in the parish church next Sunday, or I am very much mistaken. It is the thin end of the wedge."

"Ah, I am sorry; but if a man has a chapel he must have a priest, and it is hard to go seven miles to church all weathers. Besides, when all is said and done, we should wish to see Methuen have the courage of his opinions."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Sylvestre, putting down the teapot with precipitation, and actually turning a little pale, "you frighten me, Herbert! One might almost think, to hear you, that you had a bias in that direction yourself."

"Set your mind at rest, my dear—I am not of the stuff of which 'verts are made; but I see the work that Methuen is doing here in Skeffington, and I know of the same kind of thing as going on at Crawford, after a century of indifference and neglect, and I cannot withhold my approval. Moreover, although he has refused the offered nomination of J. P. for the county, I am told he is about to offer himself for election to the Board of Guardians. Every gentleman who is willing to serve his generation in that way deserves the thanks of the nation. It shall be no fault of mine if we do not carry him, though the opposition will be very strong."

"And you, as a clergyman of our loved Church, will abet the introduction of a Papist to the Board? Do you not see that he will undermine your influence on your own ground, and send his priests to contend for the souls of your paupers?"

Mr. Sylvestre slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to startle you, my dear; but the truth is, I shall be very glad of additional help in the wards of the Union. Half the inmates of the house are Irish, and therefore Papists, and have hitherto been very badly looked after. As they turn a cold shoulder to my ministrations, I shall be quite willing to pass them over to a Christian teacher of their own persuasion. Father Price was supposed to attend, but he is old and overworked. Methuen will see now that they are better treated. I hear he has been at the workhouse more than once already."

Mrs. Sylvestre's tongue clave to the roof of her mouth; she was speechless with pain and consternation.

"Of course," resumed the Vicar, "a great deal depends on the character of the priest. Price is a harmless nonentity. A red-hot propagandist would be objectionable on all scores; but I fancy Methuen would be judicious in his choice. Did I understand you to say you had seen him?"

"I saw Sir Philip Methuen yesterday standing outside one of his own hovels in Skeffington talking to a Roman Catholic priest, and I naturally passed by on the other side of the way." She spoke with an air of severity. "I heard afterward from Mrs. Mitchell that he had been at the Place more than a week past, and that Miss Foster's pretty little cottage has been taken for his occupation."

"Ah! that looks like business; we shall need to be on our guard. I thought Methuen would have liked to have had him under his own roof; but no doubt there are objections. What did the man look like, my dear?"

"Look like!" repeated Mrs. Sylvestre, contemptuously; "have they ever any individuality? That is well planned out before they are sent about their business. He looks—as Father Florentius looks without his dignity, or as Philip Methuen himself with the beauty left out. They have all the same expression of arrogant serenity, as if every question were solved, and they held the keys of the spiritual kingdom."

Her face flushed as she spoke, and the vicar looked at her with a little surprise.

"Ah, well!" he answered, "we are happy in knowing that such is not the case, and can afford to leave them to the discovery of their mistake; but I scarcely think 'arrogant serenity' describes the expression of Methuen's face."

"I see it too seldom to form any opinion," replied Mrs. Sylvestre, with all the inconsequence of a perverse woman. "It is hardly likely to be so, seeing he is Anna Trevelyan's husband. By the way, I hear that Adrian Earle is come home at last; his unfortunate brother must have been having a bad time of it lately."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Anger is certainly a kind of baseness, as it appears well in the weakness of those subjects in whom it reigns. Men must not be bees:

'Animasque in vulnere ponunt.'"

—BACON: *Essays*.

It needed a considerable effort on Philip Methuen's part to pay his first visit to poor Oliver Earle. He knew that the young man was more or less acquainted with the miserable circumstances of his marriage; and it was the instinct of his nature to conceal his private pain and grief. Even sympathy was unpalatable to his temper; and in this case he had good reason to believe that if sympathy existed, it would be largely qualified by resentment.

He had by this time provided himself with so much work to do that he had excused his reluctance on that score; also the visit of Florentius had intervened—an event which, to a man living as he did an inner life apart from those around him, was as refreshing as water-springs in a dry and thirsty land.

The circumstance of Anna having carelessly spoken of going herself to Earlescourt to see Oliver, brought Philip's hesitation to an end. It was absolutely necessary that the boy's silence should be secured on a matter which, rightly or wrongly, Methuen held it necessary to conceal.

It was late in the afternoon of a dull September day when he at last found himself at Earlescourt, within a

week or two of the date a year ago, when he had paid his farewell visit to Honor on the eve of his departure for town. He had then been in possession of a happiness so complete, and so fine in its completeness, as only a few men touch in a generation, and it had been shattered by a blow which still seemed to him brutal. Up to this hour he had never accepted his fate—only endured it. The power of association over some minds is feeble; over others it maintains a relentless and indestructible hold, so that the soul is tied and bound by the chain of immortal pain and loss.

As Methuen got off his horse and glanced through the gathering gloom toward the familiar gardens, where he and she had walked in their unspeakable joy, and then entered the house and passed the closed door of the room where he had carried out his renunciation, his face darkened, and the dull sense of habitual depression started almost into mutiny against pain. If he had not already sent a servant forward to announce his visit to Oliver, he would even then have turned and left the house without carrying out his purpose.

Oliver was lying as usual on a couch, coiled up under the covering which in his solitary hours he never relinquished, and in an attitude which showed him to be ill at ease. His face had been toward the wall, but he turned with difficulty as the man softly closed the door behind him, and he became aware that Philip had entered the room.

Philip went close up to him, and saw that the sensitive frame was twitching with suppressed excitement, and that the eyes which looked into his own were sullen and resentful. The bitterness he had felt a few moments before died out as he looked down upon the suffering, incapable creature before him, and realized that all the months of change and travel which he had passed since their last meeting, had been for the most part endured by Oliver within the weary circuit of that room—upon that couch of pain. The old accent of sweetness and pity touched his voice as he said:

"I see I am not welcome. It is enough for you to say the word, and I need never enter this room again."

Oliver continued to gaze at him steadfastly, then muttered under his breath:

"There is not a member of this family, Philip Methuen, but wishes you never had entered this room."

"Ah!" answered Methuen, "is that the feeling of your mind toward me?"

He paused and turned a little aside, hesitating what course he should adopt. To ignore Oliver's meaning, or to resent it, seemed almost impossible to him, when he could not fail to perceive that every nerve of the young man's body and mind was alive with perilous sensibility; also, it was not very hard to forgive a resentment based on the strength of his loyalty toward Honor Aylmer.

"If I had known," he resumed, "that you did not care to see me again, I would gladly have spared us both the pain of this interview. I know that you are in possession of facts, which I should have gladly kept from you; but, under any circumstances, you will allow that they do not admit of discussion between us."

The careful reserve of his manner had an unfortunate effect upon Oliver.

"Is that your line?" he answered, in his shrill, excruciating voice. "Then be warned at once, for I will not spare you! You were welcomed in this house like a brother, and you have paid us back by spoiling the life of every member of it. You have taken away from Adrian the girl he wanted and you didn't, although you knew the doing of it would well-nigh break Honor Aylmer's heart."

The mention of her name seemed for a moment to check the rage of the speaker. He broke off.

"Honor!" he repeated; "to speak of her to you is an outrage, and yet I will speak"—answering some gesture of deprecation from the other. "Shall I ever forget how she knelt by this sofa weeping, and told me her miserable story, with no thought of self, but all divine pity for you? God! how I wished I were a man instead of the useless boy I am, and could have thrashed or killed you!"

Then, as Methuen made no answer, he went on still more vehemently:

"Ever since that hour, I have been brooding in my mind how I could pay you back, even when I believed you were as miserable as you had made her, and cursed the hour when you were born. It was only left for you to show me that you were reconciled to your shame—not miserable—to take away the last shred of reluctance from my mind. You set a high value on your matrimo-

nial peace and quiet, but I will spoil them for you. I know no woman in whom the sleeping devils of jealousy and revenge would wake to better purpose than in Anna Trevelyan."

The threat was so unexpected yet so easy of fulfilment, embodying as it did what Methuen considered the supreme prospective calamity of his life, that, in spite of his firmness, he started a little and changed color.

Oliver laughed, in a low, mocking, provocative way. "You will not stoop," he said, "to beg for mercy?"

"Not for myself," was the answer, and the man's voice shook a little; "but there is no humiliation I would not accept to prevent you from causing additional pain to—to her we both love."

"That is out of my power—you have left me nothing to inflict. Besides, what harm could come to her, shut in as she is by the love of us all? You see, abject cripple as I am, I am obliged to put your punishment in the hands of a woman! Anna, mad with rage and disappointment, will—what shall we say?—recognize and revenge Honor's wrongs."

Undoubtedly Methuen was strongly moved.

It suddenly seemed as if the strenuously guarded decencies of his daily life were to be sacrificed to the purposeless malice of a boy. He knew enough of his wife's natural temper to be aware that, under the threatened provocation, any extremity of passionate unreason was to be apprehended. He shrank with extreme repugnance from the notion of Anna's knowledge of the real state of his heart and character, and of the supreme sacrifice her madness had exacted. It would be the wanton violation of all that which he would almost have given his life to keep inviolate. To hear Honor's name profaned on her lips, and the love he held as sacred the mark of her scorn and rage, would change the dull purgatory of his present existence into an active hell. He had a sickening consciousness that there is scarcely any limit to the pain, shame, and humiliation which a jealous and vindictive woman is able to inflict on a proud and sensitive man. Also, even beyond all this, was the vague misgiving of which he was conscious, that it might be in his wife's power to hurt the peace, or honor, or safety of the woman whom she had wronged.

He decided promptly that pride and self-respect must yield to the greater emergency.

"Oliver," he said, again going up to the couch where he lay, twisting and writhing in intolerable excitement, "let me understand exactly what you mean. Do you threaten to tell Lady Methuen the fact of my engagement to Miss Aylmer? If you do, I don't hesitate to own you will do me the cruellest injury one man can inflict on another, and you will drive Anna to desperation. But what will you gain when you have done it? You can not do it without parting with every shred of honor and conscience. Are you so utterly changed? If you are bent on revenge, find some other way, where at least I shall suffer alone."

"Ah!" was the answer; "then, after all, I have brought you to your knees. But it is no good. I do not say I will tell Anna Methuen to-day or to-morrow; but I will tell her sooner or later, as the mood takes me. I will see her and talk to her first, so as to find out exactly the state of her mind toward you, and where I can plant the blow with most effect. You offer me an inducement when you say I shall spoil your life—that is the future aim of mine."

There was a vindictive passion in his face and a note of triumph in his voice which went beyond Methuen's comprehension. There was also something weird and unnatural in the idea that his own moral strength and resolution lay at the mercy of this frail emotional creature. He put out his hand and grasped Oliver's shoulder, partly from the instinct which prompts to physical contact under the coercion of appeal, partly to restrain the spasmodic movements which irritated the tension of his nerves.

"It is impossible to believe," he said, "that you can be guilty of this vileness from no other motive than to punish an involuntary wrong. Will *she* thank you?"—but here Oliver, with a passionate expletive, wrenched himself away from him.

"Don't think to move me by pointing out that I can only strike you through her. That is the goad which pricks me. She must bear a little more, that you may get your deserts. Come, Methuen, I will consent to make things clearer: you have thrown away the thing that was the very core and kernel of my life. It is a ridiculous notion, isn't it, that a degraded cripple like me should have a man's heart in his breast, and dare to love the girl who has been the angel of his life, like a

goblin in a fairy-tale? But sometimes, you know, in such cases as mine, passion and instinct are in advance of years and growth; and I would have you understand that my love for Honor has long been of the kind that torments and consumes. What yours was, God knows! but I know that she gave you in return her whole soul and strength, keeping nothing back; and I was forced to be an eye-witness of it all. Maybe other men besides yourself can suffer, and hold their tongues. Don't pity me; that is an insult I will not endure from you. I can fight my own battles."

He had raised himself on his arm in the strength of his excitement, and Philip, comprehending the state of his mind, forbore to show by look or word the compassion which he felt. He went slowly back to the hearth and sat down with folded arms, waiting for the other to speak again. He knew enough of Oliver's idiosyncrasy to be quite aware that nothing was to be expected from him under the stress of personal injury. The matter was closed between them. No further appeal was possible.

"You do well to be quiet," resumed Oliver. "I kept myself from hating you, so long as you were necessary to Honor's happiness. I would even have lived under your roof, as you proposed, and sunned my frozen life in her dear presence—still not hating you, because you were the source of her joy. But—when you killed that—without pity, and breaking a deathbed oath—my mind was set free. There is not a reptile that crawls on the face of the earth that is so obnoxious to me as you are. I cannot crush you, for I am a wretched worm myself; but I will set one on that will worry out your life."

He threw himself back, as if exhausted, on his couch.

"I have done! Have you anything to answer?"

"Nothing in the way of personal protest, and any expression of feeling would be out of place."

"Nothing either in the way of explanation or self-defence?"

"To you?" asked Methuen, with a quietness which had more effect than any burst of anger or scorn. "What would your boy's judgment be worth of the necessity which was forced upon me? No; I have nothing to say to you."

He got up and glanced round the room preparatory to departure, but was careful that his face expressed nothing of the stern and bitter memories the scene evoked.

"I shall never come here again unless you send for me," he said. "I will go now. It would be a mockery to say good-by."

"But you will prevent Anna Methuen from coming to see me? Not that it will balk my purpose. I have a note from her to-day. The post is always open, and is hard to watch efficiently."

"I shall make no attempt, Oliver, either to restrain Lady Methuen's movements or to circumvent your malice. Do your worst." And he opened the door and went out.

It is not only the great troubles of life that come upon us in troops, but those lesser ignoble cares which warp our nature as well as wound it.

When Methuen returned from Earlescourt it was already late, and close upon the dinner-hour, so that he went at once to his dressing-room. A fire had been lighted there; and a certain antique bronze lamp of exquisite workmanship, which had always stood on his late uncle's writing-table, and been esteemed by him as one of his most precious possessions, shed a soft, subdued brightness on the substantial comfort of the room.

Methuen was by nature, training, and principle an ascetic; but, like other men in a similar position, he concealed his physical austerities with an ingenuity and success worthy, it may be thought, of a better cause.

Obeying now a natural impulse—for the night was raw and cold, and his whole tone of mind one of profound discouragement—he sat down close by the fire, and took up again the broken thread of his thought. It was soon interrupted by a knock at the door, to which he answered by a careless "Come in!" supposing it to be his servant Duncan, and was both surprised and disconcerted at the unexpected entrance of Anna. Without any specific arrangement on the subject, it was practically understood that Methuen wished the privacy of his own apartments to be strictly observed, and in fact his wife had scarcely entered this room before. She wore a long white dressing-gown of some woollen stuff, soft and fine as silk, and her magnificent hair was loose, and hung in a sheeny rippling mass almost to her knees.

Philip rose at once, partly from the instinct of courtesy, partly from that of the sleepless vigilance he always preserved in his intercourse with his wife. He

also knew from experience that Anna had either some grievance to disclose or some petition to offer, and his heart always closed against the feminine wiles it was her habit on such occasions to display.

"I beg your pardon," he said coldly, "I thought it was Duncan. Will you not sit down?" He placed a chair.

"No," she answered, looking smilingly around her, "I will not take your seat. How comfortable the room looks! I like it infinitely better than mine, after all. I had no idea, Philip, you knew so well how to take care of yourself. Please sit down again; I want to speak to you about something, and cannot dress or dine till the matter is settled. You are not impatient for dinner, I hope?"

"No; I am quite at your service." And he resumed his seat, rapidly forecasting what was coming.

Anna knelt down on the rug by his side, her snowy robes floating far behind her, and her hair, glowing like bronze in the light of the fire, sweeping the floor. She stretched out one of her beautiful hands to the pleasant warmth, and laid the other upon her husband's knee, turning up her alluring face to his.

"You must not be angry at what I am going to tell you," she said. "I have given Mrs. Gibson her dismissal. She was insolent, and I would not bear it. It is a great relief to my mind."

She paused and dropped her eyes at the last words, but presently looked up again on finding that he made no answer.

"You cannot mean," she went on with growing eagerness, and baffled, as she often was, by the reserved expression of his face, "so to humiliate me and compromise my authority in the house, as to interfere between me and this woman? If you were to revoke my decision, I should be the laughing-stock of the servants' hall. Say that you will not do that, Philip—that you consent that she shall go. I hate her."

"Your hatred is shameful," he said at last, "and your professions of affection for myself are an insult. There are few ways in which you could have hurt me more effectually."

"Ah!" she said insolently, and rising to her full height the better to confront him, "I knew you would be angry, but was scarcely prepared for such white heat as this. Is this woman's comfort of more consequence to you

than mine? Because she grovels at your feet—as you would like your wife to do—you are blind to the fact that she dares to treat me as your inferior—as one raised by your condescension to a dignity which I did not deserve. My hatred is not shameful—it is justified at all points.”

“We will not dispute about words,” he answered, “but consider the facts of the case. Why should you resent so strongly the sort of motherly solicitude that a woman of her age and experience would naturally feel toward a girl who is new to the cares and duties of a large household? It should touch your heart, Anna, not offend your pride. When I first came to this house,” he added, trying even against the natural movement of his mind to win her, “Mrs. Gibson never wearied of instructing and warning me as to the things I should do and leave undone. Now she transfers her anxieties to you as the greater stranger. Forgive her, dear! Make friends with her again—I will not say for my sake, but for the sake of him whose memory ought to have weight with you.”

Anna’s pale cheek burned with a sudden flame of color; tears, not of submission but of passionate anger, came into her eyes.

“Do you know,” she cried sharply, “you called me *dear*? Do you also know I never remember your calling me so before? And the first time you use the word is to cajole me into sacrificing my self-respect to your will and pleasure. No, no; soft fool as I am where you are concerned, I am scarcely to be won by a bribe so plain and pitiful as that. I would rather cut off this hand,” surveying it as she spoke, “than humble myself to make terms with Phebe Gibson. She shall end her days elsewhere.”

“Yes,” he said, in a low tone, “under my care and consoled by my devotion.”

She looked at him defiantly, though her heart quailed a little as she met his eyes. There was not so much passion as pain in them; but the pain, she thought, arose chiefly from the added sense of alienation from herself.

Nor did she make any mistake in this conclusion: the disposition she revealed excited in his mind a moral recoil inevitable as when the absence of the sun destroys light and warmth.

Still the matter in question not only touched his heart

profoundly, but his sense of duty and responsibility, in comparison with which his personal pride was held of no account. What she required of him was an act of outrage and disloyalty to the dead.

"Let me speak to her, Anna," he began again passing over all the ignoble provocations of her speech. "I will take care of your dignity, and insist upon the fullest apology wherever she has failed, however unintentionally, in respect."

"The affair is finished," was her answer. "I have provided against all such contingencies. The woman would not stay even if you were to urge her—that is, if you were capable of insulting your wife in that fashion."

"Then there is nothing more to say," he said sternly. "You have won once more, Anna; there are no weapons so irresistible as those of a relentless selfishness."

He got up from his chair and opened the door for her.

"Excuse my dismissing you; but I hear the dinner-bell, and it is scarcely worth while to break the heart of another old servant by letting the dinner spoil. I can be ready in ten minutes."

Instead of advancing, she clasped her hands together as if in supplication.

"You are very angry," she murmured; and there was a quiver in her voice, and a pathetic droop of the beautiful head.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I am very angry—so angry that you will do wisely not to try and deprecate my anger. You poison the wounds you inflict when you offer your false sighs and tears to heal them."

He stood waiting for her to go out, with an air of authority she did not choose to resist; but as she passed him she looked into his face, with her own divided between passion and pain.

"You hurt me more than you know," she whispered. "I would to God I did not love you!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Alas, thou foolish one! Alike unfit
For healthy joy and salutary pain:
Thou knowest the chase useless, and again
Turnest to follow it."

—C. ROSSETTI.

IT was an unfortunate circumstance in Lady Methuen's life that the habitual burden of *ennui* and disappointment which she felt was aggravated at this time by the coldness arising from the quarrel with her husband. Philip treated her as a matter of course with perfect consideration, but he unquestionably relaxed a little in the unfailing attention to her will and pleasure to which she had grown accustomed; and in addition to this, he had committed himself to so much out-of-door labor and supervision of labor that he was often absent from home the chief part of the day.

True, if he had been at home they would not have spent their time together. He had tried in vain, as we have said before, to interest her in books or study of any description—a modern French novel, or the volume she possessed of the poems of Leopardi, were the only literature she cared for.

He had suggested (simply from the sense he entertained of the duty of being in her company) that she should help him in certain matters of antiquarian research in which he was engaged in Lord Sainsbury's interest, but she refused almost with indignation.

Labor, without some personal end to gain, seemed to her as absurd as distasteful. If Philip would have consented to idle with her over the piano, or to play the lover with her in her morning-room, what new discoveries of allurements and charm she could have made him, and how effectually she would have cast and riveted his chains! but to this he showed no inclination to consent; and in default, and still smarting under the recollection of the words he had spoken, she gave herself up to the distractions lying close at hand.

Yes; Adrian Earle was at home again, and that in the absence of the ladies of his family. What wonder was it that he constantly turned his horse's head in the direction of Methuen Place, ostensibly to visit the mas-

ter of the house, for whom he always solicitously inquired, but in reality to while away the dull hours in Anna's brilliant society?

He was always welcome, for she was bored to death by solitude and vexation of spirit, and never failed to read in his mobile, vivid face that here at least the power of her beauty and charm was undiminished. So intimate had been their former relations, and so minute and patient was Adrian's sympathy, that Anna exercised little reserve in respect to her domestic discontent. She did not, from a natural pride, ground it upon her husband's fundamental indifference, but upon the constitutional defects of his character and his acquired insensibility to pleasure and self-indulgence—upon the divergence of their pursuits, and the consequent solitude which resulted—and every complaint she uttered, by proving to Adrian the undiminished hold the love of her life still had over her heart, helped to irritate and inflame his own.

When, he asked himself, would the time come when Anna would forego her infatuated fondness for the man who ignored and neglected her, and fall back for consolation on what it was in his power to offer? What that was he did not stop to discriminate: at any rate, he said to himself, he only hurt his own peace and compromised his own future by nursing his forlorn passion; she was guaranteed from injury only too effectually.

Also, on several occasions, Anna had driven over to Earlescourt to visit Oliver; and it would have been a great mortification to Adrian could he have known that the proud, dissatisfied, restless girl found his brother's society more stimulating than his own.

Oliver showed a curious interest in all the details of Anna's experience, and questioned her with eager pertinacity on matters which Adrian's finer sense would not have ventured to approach. Then there was always so much stress of nervous mental activity about him, that all those who were subjected to it yielded their best under his strenuous pressure. Anna fell back into the habit of her old improvisations and recitals, much more animated by Oliver's sharp criticisms than by Adrian's ardent if unexpressed admiration.

For Oliver's behoof Anna also consented to exercise her rare talent of mimicry, that took all forms, from a sharply discriminated reproduction of the singers, musi-

cians, and actors of the day, to a spiteful caricature of personal friends and relations.

Shouts of shrill laughter and applause rewarded her for these exertions; but to Adrian such exhibitions were distasteful. He thought them derogatory, and even ventured to expostulate with her on the subject.

"Derogatory!" she repeated contemptuously; "I hold nothing derogatory which helps to put wings to the leaden feet of old Time. You know I have no ideals to work up to."

"No," said Adrian, leaning toward her, and speaking in a passionate whisper, "you fulfil them."

"Ah!" she answered, with that careless touch of scorn in her voice which always made him wince, "you remind me you were once my lover; but such speeches do not please me."

Here Oliver interposed.

"Have you ever shown Philip Methuen how well you can do it, Anna? or is he in happy ignorance of his wife's talents? Would it be too great a sacrifice to your feelings to show us how *he* looks and moves and speaks?—you have had opportunities for an exhaustive study."

"I could do it—to perfection," was her answer: "but I must draw the line somewhere and I draw it there. Oh, yes, he knows I can act, for he has seen me."

"And he swelled the pæan of praise?"

"Why not, Oliver? He said I had a great gift, and that it was natural I should like to exercise it."

"But that personally he objected to such exhibitions?"

"No, he did not say that," returned Anna, a little wearily; "he is not illiberal."

Oliver laughed his low, mocking laugh.

"Is not the transformation edifying, Adrian?—Anna Trevelyan in the character of Beatrice—'taming my wild heart to his loving hand'! Only," dropping his voice, "in this case there would be a marked discrepancy in the text."

Anna looked up sharply. All weariness had disappeared from her face, which was alight with anger.

"You are insolent," she said, "as always; but another time—when we are alone—you shall tell me what you mean. I am going home now."

Adrian saw the pain that lay behind the passion, and his love justified itself in the generous unselfishness of his interference. "You do Oliver too much honor," he

said, "to take notice of anything he says. He has no meaning beyond his general desire to make every one as uncomfortable as himself. Do you know my aunt and Honor come home on Saturday?"

"I know it, and am very glad to know it."

There was unusual softness in her manner, that made his heart yearn over her. Was she brooding over the old trouble which Oliver's brutal words had quickened?

With that wistful look in her eyes which he remembered so well of old, he was almost willing that she should be satisfied after her own heart—not his.

When she approached Oliver to bid him good-by, she leaned over the low cushions on which he was stretched in front of the fire, and whispered:

"You shall tell me what you mean before many days are over."

"The sooner the better," he answered in the same tone. "There is no time to lose; come again to-morrow. I have a secret in keeping that I am bound to disclose before Honor Aylmer comes home."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"The stage is more beholden to love than the life of man: for as to the stage, love is ever matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies; but in life it does much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury."—BACON: *Essays*.

THERE is a terrible uniformity in Nature and in Life.

It so happened, by one of those *bizarre* coincidences which only gather importance from their consequences, that the day on which Anna returned home from her next visit to Oliver Earle corresponded precisely in date to that on which, a year ago, she had followed Philip Methuen to London.

Even the weather was of a like description: the half-stripped woods had the same dank and forlorn aspect; the atmosphere was heavily charged with moisture, holding mist and vapor in suspense, and shrouded the distant landscape with an impenetrable veil. Drops of water hung from the point of every leaf which still maintained its hold on bough and twig, and stood in tiny pools on the level surfaces of rail or fence—all the autumnal glory of color was washed out. A gray pall seemed to

invest the old mansion-house of Methuen Place, and to beat down the smoke of its many chimneys.

Oliver Earle had accepted Methuen's challenge, and done his worst. He had not only told his tale, but had omitted no point of exacerbation in the telling of it. He had insisted, with cruel pertinacity, not only on the reality of Philip's love for Honor, but on the passionate force and fire of that love, and on the element of indestructibility which it contained.

He had even reminded the girl of some of her own contemptuous criticisms on the cold moderation of her husband's character, and mocked her conclusions from his own accurate observation that Methuen was as capable as other men of the follies and extravagances of love.

He told her, which was not precisely true, that the wedding-day had been fixed when Methuen went up to town, and that only a fortnight divided him from his felicity when her own action destroyed it forever.

The manner in which Anna received the intelligence surprised and baffled him a little: he had expected some passionate outburst—eager questionings and denials, and ungoverned fury. He had often seen her under the influence of passion, and had prepared himself for similar manifestations, only stronger in degree.

But she sat in the full focus of his vision, silent and motionless, with no other sign of feeling than the growing pallor of her face, the gleam in her dilating eyes, which never swerved from him while he was speaking, and the tension of her ungloved hands clasped in her lap. Now and then the breath came in great gasps from between her parted lips, but still no words followed. True, there was small need for her to ask questions, for Oliver, with inhuman hardness of heart, not only obviously told her all he knew, but offered suggestions and impressions of facts.

"The crowning marvel to my mind," he said in conclusion, as he passed his handkerchief over his brows, wet with the dews of intense excitement, "is that any feminine creature could have allowed herself to be so grossly deceived as you! I mean that Nature might have suggested that one cause only could have fortified the man against such attractions as yours."

Anna stood up; she had thrown off her plumed hat, loosened her heavy cloak, and drawn off her gloves on

first entering the room, and now she began hastily to reassume them, as if in readiness for departure.

Oliver, who was watching her keenly, thought her beauty was never more superb than as she thus stood before him, speechless still, but erect and defiant, her face white and stern, and lighted by the sombre fire of her eyes. The hands which clutched the fastenings of her cloak shook almost spasmodically; but she compelled them to their office, and raised and placed her hat on her head with deliberate intention.

Then she came to the foot of his sofa: he could see the convulsive heaving of her throat, and the supreme effort it cost her to speak without breaking down; but she succeeded.

"Whom do you hate?" she said, and her voice had an unnatural harshness—"Philip Methuen or me?"

"Him!" answered Oliver sullenly, a little daunted by the intense anguish of her face. "I have good reason to hate him, and—I have put his punishment into your hands."

"Into mine!" she repeated, with a sort of hysteric laugh—"his punishment? And what of the other?"

"Of Honor?" said Oliver, and he turned a little pale; "You cannot touch Honor, and you would not if you could!"

She looked at him with the heavy lashes dropped over her lengthening gaze, and an indefinable expression came into her face.

"I think I understand," she said. "Honor is loved not—not only by—by Philip, but by you, malignant, misshapen little devil as you are! But rest satisfied! I mean to accept the work you have given me to do."

And she nodded, and went out of the room.

She had not thought about ordering her carriage, and when she got downstairs she found the coachman had taken out the horses, supposing she was likely to stay for hours, as was her custom. She left word that he was to make haste and follow her, and she would walk on in the direction of home.

But she had not gone many paces beyond the grounds, walking rapidly in her strong excitement, when she felt her strength suddenly collapse, and she was obliged to stop and lean against an adjacent gate for support. The damp mist wrapped her round and saturated her heavy clothing, and the wet ground soaked the thin shoes she

wore. She had the feeling which comes to all of us in moments of supreme suffering, of being outcast and deserted, as on that other day when she had stood in her despair on the platform of Waterloo Station.

"But I am more miserable!" said the girl, half aloud to herself, and lifting her hands instinctively to her aching head. "*Then* I was horribly afraid, but I had hope at the bottom; now——"

The word broke from her lips like the cry of some wounded animal. She was suffering the most exquisite tortures known to humanity: those pangs which have transformed the hero into an assassin, and invested murder with the sanctity of a religious rite.

Her misery seemed to assume unnatural and tragic proportions in her mind: so great was the pressure of it that she felt as if she must send up the voice of her despair into a cry loud enough to reach the empty heavens, and make the dull earth tremble on its axis. Hope was shut out of her life! There was a barrier between her and her husband that no love, no patience, no energy of endurance and effort could break down. Who but herself knew what she had suffered and condoned on the score of his insensibility and coldness—picking up the crumbs of his kindness, when her heart was craving for living bread with a hunger he refused to appease?

She heard the distant sound of carriage-wheels, and made an effort to walk on to avoid observation. When the vehicle overtook her she stumbled as she got into it, for her eyelids burned above her dazed and tearless eyes, and it seemed as if she saw nothing clearly or in due proportion.

As they approached her own house, she received almost unconsciously the weird impression of a former experience—a mental difficulty in distinguishing Now from Then. The incidents of that other terrible day rose before her mind's eye with preternatural vividness.

She saw Philip Methuen as he had crossed the platform at Trichester in the perfection of his manhood, radiant with the joy of his love; she remembered the sweetness of his lips, the gladness in his eyes; and from that hour to this his face had never worn that look, because—it had looked only upon her!

She—passionate above the feeble strength of most women, and so beautiful as to be, as it were, type and crown of her sex—sufficed only to harden his heart and

freeze the blood in his veins. And while she had chafed, fainted, and endured under this yoke of abstinence and denial, telling herself it was the defective nature of the man she adored, he was as capable as herself of the fires of love, and hated her because she had torn him from the arms of another.

And that other? Ah, God! there, at least at present, her thoughts must not rest, if she were to keep madness out of her brain, only—only—to hurt her, to make her suffer!

The passions of the race are perennial and keep the same channels; and the vengeance which has instigated so many crimes at once great and pitiful, surged in the breast of this poor nineteenth-century wife.

She had got home by this time and gone to her dressing-room, and her maid, who had relieved her of her wet cloak, was now kneeling at her feet removing her soaked shoes and stockings, and marvelling much at the condition of her mistress. There was no fellowship between the two, as often exists in such intimate relations—for Anna was always haughty and overbearing to her inferiors, and the woman ventured on no remark, and the mistress vouchsafed no explanation.

“Is Sir Philip in the house?” she asked presently.

“Pardon, my lady; I had forgotten, seeing my lady so wet and tired. He went out about an hour ago, and left a note for my lady, to be given as soon as she came in.”

The note contained only a few lines saying he had business at Trichester, and should dine and sleep at a friend's house, returning the next day; but it was written in Italian, as she always preferred him to write, and had a gracious, pleasant turn of expression. Anna, who had dismissed her maid before opening it, let it fall suddenly from her fingers as though it had stung her.

Jealousy and suspicion are passions of matchless ingenuity and resource; the idea instantly occurred to her mind that he knew as well as herself that the next day—Saturday—was the day of Miss Earle's and Honor's return, and that he designed to meet his love.

For a moment Anna even contemplated the verification of this suspicion; but finally dropped the notion as impracticable and to no purpose, and fell back into her former mood of mutinous misery.

She refused dinner, and had a cup of chocolate and

some dry toast brought to her dressing-room; and then slowly, as the first paroxysms of her passion abated, she set her mind deliberately to the solving of one problem—how to revenge her wrongs upon the wrong-doers.

So deep-rooted was Anna's impression of her inalienable early rights over Philip Methuen, that she did not hesitate to consider Honor's engagement as an act of treachery on her part toward one whom she had called her friend, and that this fact absolved her from keeping terms even with the restraints of humanity.

It is no exaggeration to say that not any calamity which could have befallen the sweet and gracious creature to whom she owed so much would have been too great or piteous to satisfy her hatred, and that in default of any misfortune in the natural order of events, she was prepared to tax all the resources of her ingenuity to provide her punishment herself.

In every pulse of this girl's magnificent frame, as she sat in her deep lounging-chair, clad in her soft, warm gown of flowing white, far into the hours of the morning, and with her feet stretched out to meet the hot glow of the fire, throbbed precisely the same lawless and ruthless temper which sent her countrywomen of the Middle Ages to the laboratories of the alchemist and physician, to win by force of beauty or of bribe the occult poison that was to still for ever the heart which had been proved or suspected to be false.

It was against Honor that her anger raged most vindictively. She had lured and won him from an allegiance he might otherwise have kept, and though to hurt and torture him as he had hurt and tortured her was her deliberate purpose, she would not have cut short the thread of his life by a single hour. Only so long as he breathed with her the vital air would life be worth living.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain and wholly well for you.
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!"

—R. BROWNING.

PHILIP METHUEN returned home at such an hour in the afternoon of the next day as proved the impossibility of his having waited at Trichester for any arrivals by the down express.

In answer to his inquiries, he learnt that Lady Methuen was indisposed, and had kept her dressing-room since her return from Earlescourt the day before.

Other functions besides conscience make cowards of us all, and his apprehensions were at once aroused as to the cause of any real or fancied interruption to Anna's splendid health.

Doubtless the young man Oliver had taken his revenge.

And if he had? Methuen was not of the type of men who are taken by events at the surprise: he had fore-lived this contingency over and over in his mind, and was prepared to meet it. On what precise lines he could not say, because he did not precisely know what form his wife's resentment would take; but that only made it a question of adaptation. The foundations on which were built up his own character and conduct were impregnable under any assault.

He sent a message to Anna by her maid, and followed it in person after the interval of a few minutes.

Anna's dressing-room was one of the few apartments which had been modernized and refurnished in Methuen Place, Philip having successfully opposed the thorough and searching upsetting of all old arrangements which his wife had been anxious to effect.

As some compensation for her general disappointment, Anna had done her best to make the fittings and accessories of this room and her own especial sitting-room as costly and luxurious as possible—so much so that, without going into technical detail, enough money had been lavished upon them to adequately furnish a

moderate mansion, and to excite a pang of conscientious compunction in Philip's mind whenever he entered them. On the day in question, Anna was lying full-length on a couch, which was drawn across the hearth in the full focus of the glowing fire, her narrow high-instepped feet, encased in Oriental slippers, negligently crossed, and her arms, from which the wide sleeves of her gown fell back loosely, clasped above her head. Their perfect shape and the exquisite texture of the flesh could not have been exhibited to better advantage than by such a posture and environment; and the sombre color of her robe, soft and clinging, and falling in straight folds from neck to heel, after her almost invariable mode, enhanced the beauty of her face, from which the hair was rigidly brushed back, as if in disdain of any added charm that might have been gathered from it.

She was lying in such a position as to face the door, and as Methuen opened it and entered, their eyes met instantly. She made no movement nor any sign of recognition—only a faint wave of color passed over her face, and her beautiful wide-opened eyes scintillated and narrowed.

Philip went up to the side of the couch, and put his hand kindly upon her arm.

"What is wrong, Anna?" he asked. "They told me you were ill; but you can scarcely be so ill as to be unable to give me a greeting—what has happened?"

"Nothing has happened," was her answer, looking at him steadily; "all things are as they were before, and you have never given me reason to suppose that my coldness would hurt you. How do you wish me to greet you?"

She rose as she spoke, and, going to the fireplace, leaned over the mantel in an attitude at once defiant and contemptuous, and with her eyes still fixed on his face; but he observed with how passionate a grip the fingers of her other hand, hanging by her side, closed over the folds of her gown, and that she trembled a little in spite of her eager efforts at self-command.

"How do you wish to be greeted?" And there was the provocation of insult in both tone and glance.

"In perfect candor and good faith," was his answer. "Something has come between us since we parted: tell me what it is, and if it has hurt you, Anna, it may be

in my power to take the sting out of the wound. Trust me, and tell me the truth."

His words, and still more the careful gentleness of his look and manner, wrought upon her like oil on flame. It had not been her intention to betray herself so openly and so soon; but every phrase he used exasperated her frame of mind beyond her poor power of endurance.

A spasm of mingled rage and pain convulsed for a moment the beauty of her face; when she spoke her voice was choked and broken from the extremity of her passion.

"Trust you, and tell you the truth!" she repeated—"you! Candor and good faith toward one whose own life has been a living lie! A cheat so consummate—so cruel—that even now I am loath to believe you are—what I have been told—traitor and impostor at all points!"

She stopped breathless, for she had launched every word as if it had been a missile; but he took no advantage of the pause, his attitude being that of simple attention.

"Are you treating me," she cried, "as you used to do when I was a child—letting me spend my rage before you tried to pacify me? Answer! Is it true what Oliver Earle has told me? Have you taken from me all I had to give—which other men prized—and given me nothing in return? When I remember—but, oh, I shall go mad if I do!—the shames and humiliations you have made me suffer—how I have schooled my pride, telling myself you were too saintly to be fond—and all the while—" She covered her face with her hands. "I cannot put it into words; but I wish that there were indeed a God and a judgment to come, that I could curse you and—her!"

"Her!"

The sound was scarcely audible; but he spoke as a man speaks who obeys an imperious instinct—the instinct of defending from sacrilege the saint he adores. Anna recoiled a little, and her face grew paler than before. "Oh," she said, drawing a deep breath, "I thought until now it was only *her* that I hated! Philip, I would lay down my life at this moment to make you suffer as I am suffering now. Do not look at me! I could kill you with my own hands!"

"It will be better that I should go away," was his

answer; and though his voice was stern, there was a look of pity in his face which made the proud, desperate girl wince under the humiliation. "As things now stand between us, there is a great deal to be said which must be spoken, but this is not the time. We do not throw words to the whirlwind."

He turned slowly and deliberately, as if to leave the room; but with a swift movement Anna sprang forward, and threw herself between him and the door. The eyes that she lifted to his own blazed with excitement.

"You shall not go! It is like a man's cowardice to escape from the sight of the misery he has made! but you shall stay and answer me. Will you dare to tell me with your own lips that what that humpbacked cripple has told me is true?—I am your wife, and you have never loved me! I thought it was because the priests who brought you up had taken the man's heart out of your bosom, and I bore it—ordered my pain to be dumb—though there have been moments when I have hated you almost as fiercely as I hate you now. Ah, God!" she broke off suddenly, striking her hands together, "what a little line it is that divides love from hate!"

Then the limitless compassion of a great nature broke down the barriers of pride, and even of a man's righteous wrath.

He seized both her hands in his, and drew her in spite of her resistance within his arms, closing her eyes with his kisses, and pressing his lips to hers with a fervor which she had never tasted before.

"Forgive me what I have made you suffer," he said; "I have been more cruel than I knew—the future shall wipe out the past—trust me, Anna."

At first she had struggled fiercely to be free; but as soon might bird or fish repel their native element as this passionate soul reject the demonstrations of the love for which her whole being yearned.

A few moments later and she was lying on his breast, with her arm about his neck, and tears of exquisite satisfaction stealing from under her closed eyelids over the pallor of her cheek.

Philip Methuen looked down upon the exhausted pain which that face expressed, and renewed the vow the extremity of her anguish had wrung from his soul. The sacrifice he had made to this girl a year ago had stopped short of righteous completeness: the letter of the con-

tract had indeed been rigidly fulfilled, but not the spirit of it. This latter he would now exact from his awakened conscience. He had married her under coercion, under revolt of every instinct of his nature; but should not his will be strong enough to subdue the mutiny of the flesh, and to graft an alien but lawful passion upon the natural stem? Or if not, it was but a shifting of imperative duty: what would then behove him would be the strenuous counterfeit—the flawless simulacrum of the love beyond his power to transfer.

It is probable that if Philip Methuen had received a different training—one in which it had not been the rule to probe and dissect impulse and motive to their innermost fibre and pore, as with a microscope over the seeds of principle and duty, in order to detect their germination and growth—he might have accepted and met the hardship and difficulties of his position in a simpler and more direct fashion. Also, nine men out of ten would not have experienced that hyper-refinement of sentiment which induced him to conceal so solicitously his former relations with Honor Aylmer, in order to guard what appeared to him the sanctities of their love, and to spare the susceptibilities of Anna Trevelyan.

If, however, he had hoped that this new departure on his side would suffice to silence and satisfy his wife beyond the first excitement of feeling, he was doomed to disappointment, and to a very speedy discovery that it was not so.

He had lifted Anna in his strong arms, and put her back upon the couch, saying that she was exhausted and weary, and had better rest alone till dinner-time, and had then turned from her with the view of leaving the room, when she caught his hand to detain him.

"No: don't go away," she said. "Your kindness just now almost took away my senses for the time; but I am quiet now, and able to think. Sit down by my side, Philip; you won't refuse in your turn to tell me the truth."

"I think we shall spare each other much unnecessary pain," was his answer, "if we take this day as a new start in life, and forbear to rake up the ashes of the past."

"Ah, but I have no past—no ashes to rake up! I mean all my life has been open to you. It is only fair, before I trust you for the future, that you should tell

me what there is in your life which has been kept back from me—otherwise I shall not be able to trust your promises. In one word, is what Oliver Earle told me about you and Honor Aylmer—the truth?”

It cost her a struggle to speak the name quietly, but she succeeded. She saw that he hesitated a moment before he answered, and that, when he did, something of the old reserve of his manner toward her was apparent in tone and expression.

“I do not know what Oliver Earle has told you,” he said, “and I ask, as a concession on your part, that you will spare me the repetition of it. True or false, it belongs to the irrevocable, and has nothing to do with your relations and mine to-day. I think, Anna, I must refuse to go over this ground with you.

“No, you must not do that,” she exclaimed eagerly, and raising herself on her arm, so as to be able to look more directly into the face he had averted. “Remember you have just pledged yourself not to be cruel—not to make me suffer as I have done—and there is no peace of mind possible for me until it is set at rest on this point. I will not vex you more than I can help”—but there was a spark of sombre fire kindling in her eyes—“but it is within my rights to be told whether Oliver Earle has dared to malign you and insult me.”

“Yes,” he answered, “I cannot deny that this is within your rights, and therefore I will not refuse any longer to answer. If Oliver Earle told you that Miss Aylmer and I were engaged before—before your marriage and mine took place—he told you the truth.”

Anna had never felt a momentary doubt of the truth from the first moment that Oliver had asserted it; but involuntarily, as Philip’s words reached her ears, she put her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out a fact too hard for her to face.

But she had spent her violence, and had already decided that a quieter course would not be less effectual. No one but her husband could be credulous enough to believe that a few passionate kisses, yielded by his generosity to her extremity, were to wash out the record of her wrongs.

“And yet,” she answered, speaking under her breath, and with her hand still shading her eyes, “you had pledged yourself to me from the time we were boy and

girl together; and she knew that I had no other love in my heart than love for you."

"I think," he said firmly, "as this subject has been forced upon us, that it will be better to speak plainly on all points. You have just now repeated a statement, Anna, which you have often made before, and I have not thought it worth while to dispute; but it is necessary to do so now. I was never pledged to you by any ties beyond affectionate good will and friendship for your father. Also, Miss Aylmer had no such knowledge as you speak of, until your own action forced the conviction upon her, and then—she consented to forego her own rights to secure your happiness." His face flushed and darkened. "You force me to say what it is hateful both to speak and to hear," he added, in a lower tone.

Anna deliberately let her hands fall from her face and looked at him with passionate, reproachful eyes. He had got up from the seat he had taken by her side, and was standing on the hearth opposite her.

"Is this," she said, "so far as your compunctions go—an instalment of the loving-kindness you promised?"

"The retort," he answered, "is one quite natural for you to make; but all the same I do not deserve it. It is you who have forced this subject upon me, and refused to forbear even when I stooped to solicit your forbearance, and it is now become necessary to set it in its true light. This once—but, understand, never but this once—Miss Aylmer's name shall be mentioned between us, and mentioned in order that you may do justice to the goodness which has never warmed your heart, although you owe to it almost every good thing in life you have enjoyed."

Anna trembled with indignation. All the old rage and passion swelled again. "You mean—I owe to her—the blessing of being your wife!"

"No," he said, "I did not mean that;" and the complete absence of heat and excitement in his manner only served to fan her own. "It would be both useless and unmanly in me to remind you to what circumstances our connection is owing, and I can well believe that you have long ceased to regard it in the light of a blessing. I simply mean that Miss Aylmer was the friend of your girlhood; sweet and kind and generous to you, in spite of your frequent perverseness, and providing you with

pleasures and outlets such as could never have reached you otherwise as Mrs. Sylvestre's niece. The ties which bind you to her are so strong that it is hard to understand how the sudden knowledge that you have injured her—even though at unawares—can excite any feeling but sorrow in your mind; and I should think exactly the same, Anna, if Miss Aylmer and I were strangers. As for myself—I have already owned my behavior has not been blameless; but even in my case extenuating circumstances might be found."

"No doubt!" was the girl's answer. "Because I took your love out of your arms and forced you to stifle the heat and ecstasy of your passion, or to transmute them into the ice and iron of our relations! Oliver has told me how saint and celibate can love."

"Do not quote Oliver!" he said sternly. "I am prepared to tell you myself that I loved her dearly, but the fire was fire of heaven! There is only one more word to say: we were within three weeks of our marriage when you followed me to Bruton Street."

"You do well to be explicit—I will never forget it! Is it within my province to ask if that heavenly fire is now extinct? or is it the burden of your confession to your priest and your protracted prayers at the altar?"

He looked at her with that expression of aloofness which had often tormented her with the conviction that he stood too far off from her to be hurt by her.

"We confess our sins," was his answer, "and there is no sin in my love for Honor Aylmer. All that there was of earth or dross has long been consumed." And then he came a little nearer to her, both in act and manner: "Let us consent that this unhappy page in our life shall be closed once and for ever. There is need of forgiveness on both sides. I mean to love you in the future, Anna, after your own heart's desire."

There was the old light in his eyes and the sweetness in his smile that she had sometimes thought was lost to her for ever; but her heart was so sore that it did not move her.

"You give me alms," she said, "as you give alms to your papers at Crawford; but I will not take them. What do you think I am made of? Your kindness is worse than your cruelty. Do not go away deceived—I am not pacified. Your plaster has not healed my wound; that is left for me to manage in my own way."

"You mean that there is to be strife between us?"

She gave a little unnatural laugh. "Do not be afraid; I will not do you any bodily harm, although just now I threatened to kill you, and—I am made of the stuff that does such things! But that would be a blundering revenge."

He looked at her with an anxiety he could not wholly conceal. He knew from long experience the strength of her passions, the ingenuity of her arts, and the absence of all the saving restraints of conscience and pity.

Was Honor Aylmer safe if this girl were bent on her injury? And then he mocked his instinctive apprehension as absurd and untenable in the thick of the social conventions of the nineteenth century, and for one surrounded by friends and relations, and the natural safeguards of high position.

"Revenge is always a blunder," he said, "and one that seldom fails to recoil. Please God, Anna, I will win you to a better mind."

She smiled, and got up from her sofa with the air of one who wishes to close an interview. "The promises of good behavior are all on your side, you will observe. I wish things to go on precisely as they did before. So I intend to come down to dinner to-day, being as anxious as you always are that the servants should not think we have quarrelled. May I trouble you to ring for my maid?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"The changes wrought
Type our own change from passion into thought.
What though our path at every step is strewn
With leaves that shadow'd in the summer noon;
Through the clear space more vigorous comes the air,
And the star pierces where the branch is bare."

—LYTTON.

NEARLY six years have passed since we first looked into the bright interior of the house of Earlescourt, and now that Miss Earle and Honor are at home again, it bears externally almost the same aspect as it did then. Sir Walter Earle's voice rings just as cheerily through hall and chamber. And Honor, now as she was then, and has been through all the interval between, is still the constant companion of his constitutional morning

ride, his intelligent referee in all matters, whether of political research or on moot points respecting timber, tenant, or farm, well as the confidante of his public and private dissatisfactions.

Miss Earle is content to confine her rule within her own kingdom, which is the direction of household affairs to that point of perfection which makes Earlescourt at once the admiration and despair of the neighboring county ladies, or perhaps, more strictly speaking, of their lords.

Adrian still lives his aimless life, at once eager and indifferent, and into this is now introduced the enervating element of love for another man's wife, which, while it holds him in a passionate bondage, sapping the springs of health and mental vigor, yet leaves his eyes open to perceive the abounding sweetness and patience of the woman who is still his daily companion and friend.

But to that woman life in the old home has changed. Her accustomed routine is just the same, as we have said, and her personal influence is perhaps more tender and penetrating; but the glory and splendor of youth and hope are passed away. We do not mean that Honor's life is an empty and blighted one; but its ardor is tamed, and her dreams and ambitions are for others, not herself.

Her intellectual and artistic interests are still pursued as diligently as ever—more so perhaps, as happens when it is necessary to pour into these channels the energies which have been blocked elsewhere.

Her trouble was not so much because she had lost the lover of her youth—if the resistless hand of Death had parted them, Honor could have accepted that stroke—but because running through the warp of her own life was the woof of his untoward destiny.

In a sense she identified herself with all his provocations and denials: the first thought when she awoke in the morning was how he might fare through the weary day, and the last at night was the tender hope, which became a prayer, that things had not gone too hardly with him.

When she got back to Earlescourt the pressure naturally became more severe; they were so near, and yet so far.

Also the reports of his strenuous work among the poor, of his zeal in the repair of long-neglected obliga-

tions, and in the maintenance and exaltation of his religion, were all charged with a pathetic meaning to her mind.

Then she had reason to believe, though Adrian never told her, that he was constantly at Methuen Place; and this fact, coupled with his increasing gloom and irritability, was of sinister omen for Philip's peace.

And there was another circumstance which perhaps went as far as any other to spoil the comfort of her daily life. Oliver's room was no longer a pleasant resort. The boy had become (by a sudden bound, as it seemed to her) a man, and the man was bitter, ungracious, and increasingly mutinous under the hardships of his lot.

It had now become a thing almost impossible to please him: he found fault with her music, calling it mechanical and prosaic, and criticised her paintings with cynical severity; while again, on occasion, his passion of compunction and gratitude assumed a form that brought the color to her cheek, and aroused a vague misgiving.

It need scarcely be said that Oliver kept the secret of his own love, at least as far as open declaration went, and also of his breach of faith in regard to Anna. On this point he had taken no one, not even Adrian, into his confidence, although he had eagerly questioned him as to what appeared to be the existing relations between her and her husband.

Here, however, Adrian could not satisfy him; he now carefully timed his visits to avoid Philip Methuen, and it suited Anna's purpose not to betray the knowledge she had acquired.

Shortly after their return home, Miss Earle had proposed to Honor that they should pay a call of ceremony at Methuen Place, and this they had done, the result being extremely unsatisfactory.

They did not see Philip, and Anna's manner was uncertain and depressed.

When she returned the call she came alone, explaining that her husband was gone up for a few days to Lord Sainsbury's place near Guilford. There was an air of weariness and repressed excitement in her manner, which was not lost on Miss Earle's keen perceptions. She had never liked Anna, and she had thought that no circumstances could ever induce her to pity the girl who had wronged Honor so grievously; but we are nobler than our resentments, and there was something in the

look of the young wife's face which appealed to her sympathy.

"You must be very lonely," she said kindly. "I wonder you don't have one of your cousins with you."

"I am always lonely," was Anna's answer; "but my aunt Sylvestre would not allow Dolly to stay with me, lest she should curtsy to the crucifix in the chapel, and Philip should lead her soul astray. She need not be afraid; it is necessary to be a pauper, or otherwise loathsome, to excite Sir Philip's sympathies."

She looked up and met Adrian's eyes; he had come into the drawing-room, and had stayed when he saw who his aunt's visitor was. It followed, therefore, as a matter of course, that he took her down to see her into her carriage.

"Wait a moment, Anna," he said, as they reached the last stair of the broad staircase; "your shoe is untied."

He knelt before her as he spoke to secure the lace, she standing a little above him, and accepting the service with her careless, imperial air. As he rose he pressed his lips passionately to the thin silk covering of the beautiful, dainty foot. A deep crimson blush, such as he had never provoked before, rose in Anna's cheek; she leaned over him and touched his bowed head for a moment with her ungloved hand. It was like a caress, and wrought upon his facile sensibility almost to madness.

"Anna," he said huskily, almost crushing in his vehemence the hand he had caught in his own, "is the time come for your long patience to be wearied out and mine to be rewarded?"

She looked at him with curious attention. His delicate face, flushed and inspired by passion, moved her a little.

"Come and see me to-morrow," was her answer, "and I will tell you."

He went to her on the morrow, but found her mood changed. His passion brought no color to her pale cheek, and his prayers were met by a baffling calculation of chances.

She was dressed in the soft, clinging black gown in which she had received her husband a few weeks before; but it was now belted round her waist with a crimson sash, and she had a handkerchief of the same color knotted under the lace about her throat. The costume suited her to perfection; but that was always the impression produced with whatever Anna put on.

To Adrian's eyes she had never looked so beautiful, and the languor of her face and dejection of her manner were provocations at once to his pity and his love.

"Do not think," she said, in answer to his pleadings, "that I reject what you beg me to do because it is wicked? I have no feeling of that kind. I would go away with you to-morrow—to-day—if I thought it would make me happy—happier, I mean. We worms of earth are never happy. Life is what my father used to say—just one long struggle against misery, with the certainty of being beaten in the end. Only some of us are beaten in the beginning."

She got up as she spoke, and began to walk up and down the room, trailing her long skirts along the floor, and with her clasped hands falling loosely before her. She did not interrupt her lover's eager assurances of the heaven that he would secure for her in the future, but listened as if she wished to be convinced, with her beautiful head a little raised, and her eyes looking straight beyond.

"I am quite sure," she answered, when he paused a little, "that you are in earnest, and I believe what you say; but the doubt in my mind is whether I should be better off. I don't deny that I am now a very miserable girl—yes, you may curse him if you like!—but I am not a disgraced one. Sin has no terrors for me, but shame has."

"Shame should not touch you, Anna, my love! my queen!"

He would have approached her, to put his arms about the beauty that drew him with an irresistible lure; but she made an impatient movement of restraint.

"You forget," she said, "that I do not love you, Adrian, though I am willing to wish that I did, and you see the case stands thus. Which is harder—to live with a man who does not care for me, but from whom I cannot tear away the fondness that was sown in my heart as a child; or with the other, who gives me what I do not want and cannot return?"

"No woman should be able to resist the love which should hedge you round."

There was the humility of a great passion in his tone and glance, and Anna was for the moment moved to kindness.

She paused by his side and put her hand lightly on

his arm. "I am very sorry for you, Adrian; and I repeat, I would love you if I could. Then I would dare the shame."

"What shame could touch my wife? You do not doubt my honor, Anna?"

"If that were possible," she answered, "you should not plead in vain, for where the honor of his name is concerned even Philip would feel; and he deserves to suffer at my hands. But you forget he is a Catholic—he would never go into the divorce court."

Adrian's head drooped for a moment; he had ventured to put his hand upon hers, so as to keep her touch upon his arm. When he looked up, his eyes were wet with tears.

"I had forgotten; but—it would only mean deeper devotion—a more tender respect on my part——"

She stooped over him and touched his lips with hers; but when he would have seized her in his arms, she broke away with a passionate resistance he did not choose to overcome.

"Why did you send for me?" he asked. "Is it part of a woman's cruelty to exasperate the love she will not share, and amuse her leisure by making sport of the pain she inflicts? When you call me again I will not come."

"Do not say that, Adrian; for if ever I send for you again it will mean that I have made up my mind to cast in my lot with yours—that the chain at which I pull galls past bearing. You will not fail me?"

He renewed his pledges, and went away more hopelessly demoralized than before. The love of this girl, stimulated by her mingled frankness and coldness, permeated his whole being with the poison of tantalized desire and despair. Out of her presence he seemed to have scarcely patience enough to draw the breath of life, and the family affection and manly honor which, in spite of indolence and self-indulgence, had kept his nature sweet and wholesome, sickened and died in the malarious atmosphere.

He shunned Honor's pure eyes, and avoided as much as possible contact with his father, of whose mocking penetration he stood in dread.

A good part of the shortening winter days—shortened still more by the morning hours consumed in bed—he spent in his brother's room. Oliver's bitterness had as-

sumed of late almost a savage form. And there was something congenial to Adrian's disordered mind in the young man's impious arraignment of Heaven and Fate, and in the malignant enmity he professed toward Philip Methuen.

Sometimes Adrian rode, or even, from sheer restlessness of spirit, walked as far as Methuen Place, and haunted the park or entered the gardens in the hope of encountering Anna; but he soon learned that neither she nor her husband was at home. He, it was said, was still at Guilford—the few days having apparently run to a fortnight—and she, driven no doubt by the desperation of her loneliness, was gone to pay an unusual visit to Skeffington Vicarage.

This was in truth the explanation of Anna having yielded to her cousin Dorothy's urgent entreaties: the solitude of the Place during the interminable winter evenings had become intolerable, and she had a proud reluctance to go into society during Philip's absence. It would, she thought, divert her mind and quiet her increasing restlessness, were she to submit herself once more for a few days' time to her aunt's rule, and lie down at night beside her innocent cousin in the meagre white bed of her girlhood. She had dreamed happier dreams there than had ever known fulfilment.

The first few days passed with fair pleasantness. Dolly was more than ever her beautiful cousin's humble servant and worshipper, and the younger girls followed in the same track. The vicar was kind and genial, full of talk about parish matters, concerning which Anna's knowledge and interests had equally fallen into arrears; but she was at the trouble to feign the latter; and even Mrs. Sylvestre was inclined, on the whole, to admit that Anna had behaved herself since her marriage rather better than she had expected.

On the Saturday, however, the fourth day of Anna's visit, a little friction occurred.

The family were gathered round the breakfast-table at what appeared to Lady Methuen the unnatural hour of nine o'clock, the room not yet warmed with the recently kindled fire, and the accessories of the table looking meagre and inadequate to her practised eyes.

Mrs. Sylvestre was dispensing the tea, and kept the post-bag at her side till she had leisure to open it—a function she strictly monopolized. Anna was secretly

eager to get her letters—that is, she was nervously afraid lest Adrian Earle should have been ill-advised enough to have written to her. It jarred on her irritability to watch the precision with which her aunt selected the key from the huge bunch she had drawn out of her pocket, and then fitted it into the lock.

The bag did not contain more than half-a-dozen letters; four of them were for the vicar, and of the remaining two one was for Anna and the other for her aunt.

“Is it from your husband?” asked Mrs. Sylvestre, as she handed it to her.

“It is an enclosure from my maid,” said Anna; and as a matter of precaution, for her aunt’s keen eyes were studying her face, she was about to slip it into her pocket, when that lady asked again, with a significant inflection of tone:

“Is it not worth while to ascertain if it is from Sir Philip? This is the third morning of your stay, Anna, and a letter from him is surely due.”

Thus urged Anna opened the envelope, and ascertained, before withdrawing the letter it held, that it was not the one she had feared.

All else was plain sailing. She drew out the enclosure and examined it openly, knowing that every eye was upon her, but now perfectly indifferent to the fact.

“It is not from Philip, aunt, though you are right in thinking it ought to be, for I have not had a letter from him for more than a week. But wait a moment: the postmark is Guildford, Lord Sainsbury’s town, and there is a coronet on the seal—there is something wrong.” Anna’s face blanched as she spoke, and a sudden spasm of the throat seemed to choke her. The next moment she poured contempt on her weakness. “And if there is,” was the inward whisper, “what is that now to me?” She glanced round at the expectant faces, broke the perfect seal, deliberately smoothed the sheet, and read as follows:

“SAXELBY, GUILDFORD,
12th Dec. 1881.

“DEAR LADY METHUEN: Let me assure you at once, on recognizing my handwriting, that you have no cause to be alarmed because I have turned amanuensis for your husband. He has met with a slight accident, and disabled his right hand, so as to be forbidden to make use

of it for a few days, but there is no cause for anxiety. He is very anxious that you should know that this is the reason of the break in his correspondence, and his staying here beyond leave of absence. He has been daily expecting to be able to write or return. As the doctor still puts his veto upon his doing either for the next few days, I write to explain what we both fear must have cost you surprise and uneasiness.

"Pray accept the assurances of my friendly regards.

"SAINSBURY."

Anna suffered the letter to drop carelessly from her fingers, and an angry glow came into her face. Was that all? and her love had been so quick to take fright, and she had betrayed her fondness to her aunt and cousins!

"Lord Sainsbury might have spared his consideration," she remarked, breaking the little pause that followed on her own silence. "I felt no uneasiness! I am not one of the women who feed on letters: they bore me either to write or read, and Philip knows this. It had never struck me that he ought to have written."

"But does it not strike you now as a little odd," asked Mrs. Sylvestre dryly, "that Lord Sainsbury does not say what was the cause of the accident? Or is the habit of suppression and reserve so ingrained that they cannot persuade themselves to be straightforward, even in the common affairs of life, and where nothing is to be gained by concealment?"

"*They!*" repeated Anna irritably. "I don't understand."

"I mean your husband and his co-religionists. Do you mean to tell me that Sir Philip Methuen is open and above-board like English gentlemen—that you know, Anna, what he is doing, and thinking, and planning for the future, or even what his feelings are in regard to the past?"

An angry light came into Anna's eyes: there was something in the question that chafed her temper.

"It would bore me terribly if I did! I have not a spark of interest in the Conservative programme for next session, in the defence of Catholic rights in this country, or even in the roll of paupers in Crawford Union; and these are the points around which Philip's mind mostly revolves."

"Talking of Crawford Union," said the vicar, anxious to pour oil on the troubled waters, "a case came before the board yesterday, on which I should have been very glad to have had Sir Philip's help and advice. A woman presented herself for admission, who was being passed on to her own parish at Trichester. She had a big child in her arms, whom she alleged to be too sick for farther travel, besides being worn out herself. The medical officer saw the child, said it was suffering from small-pox, and refused to admit either. She was instructed to proceed to Trichester, where the authorities will be bound to meet the difficulties of the case. It seemed cruel. I can assure you her curses were both loud and deep."

"But she will spread the infection wherever she goes," objected Mrs. Sylvestre.

"On that point she was duly warned, and it was calculated that she would reach her destination before night. I doubted it, however."

"Was it of much consequence?" asked Anna. "A wretched pauper, and a child sick of a loathsome disease! It will save and be saved a great deal of misery if it die on the road."

She rose from the table as she spoke, and summoned Dolly by one of her significant gestures to accompany her out of the room. "Come upstairs with me," she said, as they stood together a moment in the lobby, "and help me to put my things together. I mean to go home this morning. I have had enough of this!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

WHEN they had reached the bedroom, Anna slipped on the superb sealskin coat which was her present out-door garb, and sat down in the familiar window-seat, while Dolly, who had not ventured to protest against this sudden departure, busied herself in collecting and folding her cousin's things.

"It is marvellous to me," said Anna, as she leaned back with her head against the shutter, watching her

companion through her long, half-closed eyelids, "how I ever endured this! Midwinter and no fire—no couch nor even easy-chair allowed for weary limbs, and the necessity of doing everything for one's self, or else going without its being done!"

"I don't think," replied Dolly, with her bright little laugh, "that you were ever reduced quite so low as that. In the old days, Anna, you always contrived to make me pretty useful."

"In the old days!" repeated Anna, and she closed her eyes, lest Dolly should see they were suddenly wet with involuntary tears.

The words have a cruel power over most human hearts, being charged with the sense of the dire discrepancy between hope and fulfilment; but to this selfish, unhappy, passionate girl the old times meant when she had believed in Philip Methuen's love, and been ignorant of that great treachery which had changed life and its outlook for her.

Dolly glanced toward her, and then said a little timidly, as she rolled and smoothed the ribbon in her hands:

"I wonder if every one is disappointed with what life brings them! I used to think when you married Sir Philip Methuen that you would be the happiest girl in the world. You know, Anna—you won't mind my saying it—you were so very, *very* fond of him!"

"I don't mind in the least, Dolly"—and Anna's voice sounded to her cousin sweeter and gentler than she ever remembered to have heard it before—"I never did mind all the world knowing that it was so. No woman ever loved a man better than I did—my husband. But—we will not talk of it."

"Not talk of it!" repeated Dolly. "Why, it is the very time to talk of it, when one has got what one wanted and holds it safe and secure for the rest of one's life! And I don't wonder you care for him so much; for, if I only meet him on the road and he calls me by my name and asks me how I am, I feel better and happier, and worth more than I did before."

Anna smiled. "Thank you, little Dolly; that is prettily said, but we will get on with the packing. I am out of sorts and restless, and want to get home again, although there is nobody there. I shall walk and send for my things. Oh, yes, I remember quite well that it is the practice in church this morning, and you won't be

able to come with me, but I don't mind that. I am not sure that I would not rather walk home alone."

She turned her head and looked out of the window, where the tower of the old Norman church showed clearly above the leafless trees. "Is the choir improved, Dolly, since I last sat in the Vicarage pew?" she continued. "I hear from Mary that you and Godfrey Latham are indefatigable, and that the boys can get through 'Hark, the herald-angels sing!' without a hitch. I fancy those angels have had a special message to you and him, Dolly!"

Dolly's fair cheek was tinted like a sea-shell. "If you only knew, Anna," she answered, in a little tender whisper, and with her blue eyes shining with glad tears—"if you only knew how—how *nice* he is!"

Anna drew her breath sharply. "If I knew!" she repeated; "I know all about it, dear, and—and you will be twice as happy as Philip and I. That is, I mean, I wish you may be so—only, of course, that is hard to imagine."

She seemed to speak without intention, and there was a strange, wild sadness in the expression of her face. Dolly drew her soft little hand tenderly over her cheek.

"Of course," she said, "I quite understand. You are uneasy about this accident, and it was very remiss of Lord Sainsbury not to tell you particulars. But a few days will soon pass, Anna; he said a few days, didn't he, dear?"

"But I do not think a few days will bring Philip. I am not like myself to-day, as I told you, Dolly, and I have an odd presentiment hanging over me that something is going to happen before—before I see him again. Do you ever feel like that?"

It was not Anna's wont to take the posture of equality, and Dolly felt a little vague uneasiness. She answered, however, gayly enough: "Do I ever? Often and often! and it is a good omen. I felt precisely like that on the day when—when Godfrey Latham met me in Star-Acre meadow and told me that—that there was no other girl he liked so well as me. Good-by, darling Anna; I hear papa calling me. Your maid can finish these things."

The girl seized her jacket, hat, and gloves, and slipped into them with practised celerity. She looked marvelously pretty, with the divine love-light in her eyes and in the smile on her lips. As she went out softly, closing

the door behind her and humming a merry tune as she ran downstairs, Anna stepped back to her former position and threw herself down in the window-seat, bending forward till her bowed head met her clasped hands.

"Mother of God!" she cried in the bitterness of her heart, "I cannot bear it—the joy of this girl and her lover! How can I punish the man who has made me suffer like this?"

And then she suddenly raised her head and stood erect on her feet.

"The *man*, did I say? Fool that I am, I would not hurt him! but the woman—who took him from me—let her pay the penalty for both! I can wait and watch."

Lady Methuen's stubborn and capricious temper was so well appreciated by her aunt, that when she announced her intention of returning home to luncheon, and walking the distance, no objection was raised. Indeed, it was always a relief to Mrs. Sylvestre when she and Anna parted: the truce between them was always an armed one.

It was a gray December morning, the third day of a hard frost. The earth was like iron beneath the feet, and there was not a break or hint of sunshine in the gloomy, leaden sky overhead. There was no gleam of sea to be distinguished, and the distant hills stood out hard and colorless. The dismal bleat of the newly dropped lambs was heard in most of the pasture-fields skirted by the road along which Anna's path lay.

She walked rapidly, and with no sense of physical discomfort. She was young and in vigorous health, and exercise would soon have warmed the blood in her veins even if she had not been clothed in furs from head to foot. But the motion brought no exhilaration with it, nor lightened the weight at her heart, nor relaxed the tension of the beautiful brows and set mouth, nor the gloom of the eyes looking straight before her.

It seemed strange, even to herself, the hold which her little cousin's love-story had taken of her mind. She followed her in imagination into the chancel of the fine old church, and saw the meeting between the two. Not many words spoken, but the direct glance of eyes which spoke love to eyes, and the instinctive meeting and close clasp of the cool young palms.

Godfrey Latham was a fair, straight-limbed, gentleman-like young fellow, with no special gifts or graces;

but he had an honest faith in the creed to which he was professed, and a manly love for his vicar's sweet daughter, and this very singleness and simplicity possessed a direct charm for Anna's brooding mind.

"Love is enough," she said to herself, "what have I ever wanted but his love?"

She had accomplished half the distance between the Vicarage and Methuen Place, and had hardly met half-a-dozen people. It was surprising how lonely the road was, though it was between twelve and one o'clock in the day; but these Dorset districts are sparsely peopled, and work in field and pasture is at its height at noon. Presently, however, she became aware of wheels advancing on the road behind her, and looked round sharply. Anna was by no means anxious to encounter any friend or acquaintance at that moment; her walking alone, without even a dog as companion, might look odd, and excite remark, and just now she was specially anxious to escape stricture or observation.

The air was so clear and rarefied by the frost, and the surrounding quiet so great, that the sound had reached her ears before the vehicle came into sight. She walked on more swiftly than before, and did not again look back till the carriage was close upon her, and the sound of Honor Aylmer's familiar voice in her ears.

Honor was driving a pair of ponies in an open phaeton; like most country-bred girls, she disliked a close carriage, except under stress of weather. She stopped the carriage by Anna's side, and leaned toward her with frankly extended hand.

"I recognized you half a mile off," she said, smiling. "There is no mistaking your imperial gait! Will you jump in and let me drive you home? We are well met, for I am anxious to speak to you."

"No, thank you," returned Anna coldly. "I dislike driving in cold weather, and I would rather walk. I can wait for what you have to say till another opportunity."

She had barely glanced toward her, and her manner was unfriendly to the point of incivility; but Honor's keen sweetness had detected the unusual melancholy of the girl's expression, and her heart warmed toward her, thinking she divined the cause.

"Then I will walk with you a little way, and the carriage can go on and return."

Anna gave no sign of assent, but Honor was not to be repulsed. For all that, there was something in her companion's proud reserve which made the task she had set herself a difficult one. Perhaps it was this consciousness which made her rush upon it a little abruptly.

"All of us at home," she said, and her color deepened a little, "are anxious to hear news of Sir Philip. We hope his accident is not of a serious nature. You have heard from him, of course?"

The simple words were like a match to a mine. Anna trembled with suppressed passion, and the lines of her face hardened. Nothing had ever cost her a greater effort than to say, in a tone which, though harsh and uncourteous, stopped short of positive offence:

"I do not understand—how can you know anything about his accident? It is not possible—" And the flame that leaped into her eyes and touched the pale cheeks with crimson supplied the words she could not utter.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Honor eagerly; too eagerly, perhaps, as the mere fact of her comprehension seemed damning evidence of guilt to Anna's mind. "We read the paragraph in the papers, like all the rest of the world; but beyond that we naturally know nothing. You can scarcely be angry, Anna," she added, with a gentle dignity, "that such old friends as we are should wish to know how he is."

Anna stood still in the road, for she was too excited to speak as she walked. The trivial circumstance of Honor's knowledge being superior to her own, owing to the fact that she herself never read the newspapers, and that this ignorance placed her at a certain disadvantage, stimulated her jealousy and resentment beyond her control.

But before the words of insult and outrage had left her lips, an incident occurred which turned the current of her wrath.

They had reached a turn in the road where a wide five-barred gate gave access to a ploughed field of considerable extent. In one corner of the field, close to where the two girls were standing—for Honor had naturally stood still when Anna did the same—was a shed, newly thatched, which was used as a storehouse for mangold roots, and a woman carrying a child in her arms had just emerged from this shed, and was making her way toward the highroad. She walked like one

overweighted by her burden, and there was an unmistakable air of misery, and revolt against misery, in her countenance and gait. The child was a conspicuous spot in the landscape, being covered all over with an old red shawl.

As she approached them, Anna recoiled instinctively. It would be difficult to say how the impression was borne upon her mind—seeing that a female tramp with a child in her arms is no uncommon sight on country highroads—that the pair now before her eyes was the identical woman and child of whom her uncle had spoken that morning; but it was so. Her first impulse had been to call to the woman to keep her distance, and to warn Honor of her danger; but another thought had flashed into her mind and arrested the words.

The woman, attracted by the sweetness of Honor's face, had begun volubly enough to tell the story of her wrongs and beg for charity; and there was a certain indignant independence in her manner, which distinguished it from the ordinary whine of the professional beggar, and disposed the listener favorably toward her.

Anna, before whose strained sight the scene seemed enacted like the phantasmagoria of a dream, where one is helpless to exert the suspended volition, saw that Honor, obeying the instinct of compassion, was every moment lessening the distance between her and the unhappy creature who held that fatal burden in her arms.

She perceived that in another instant she would touch it—bend over it—perhaps (for like Philip, Anna said to herself, while the breath came in eager pants between her parted lips, Honor had no temperance in her humanity), perhaps she would even take it in her arms.

And if she did, was it fault of hers, or any part of her duty to keep Honor Aylmer back from harm?

Rather, did not fate or chance, or whatever kind force governed the world, offer her, scathless, the satisfaction of her revenge? Here was the poison-cup presented to the lips of the woman who had taken from her the heart of Philip Methuen; but her hand had not mixed the draught, nor even administered it. Yet what drop of concentrated essence from mediæval crucible had more potency than the baleful breath of that infected child?

It was not death that she thought of or even desired for her victim, but the destruction of the loveliness which had made her own powerless—the branding and biting into the grace of that sweet and alluring face, which had never looked more sweet and alluring than at that moment.

It might well be that he had looked his last upon it under that aspect; that the next time he stood face to face with Honor Alymer, it would be to receive into his soul the loathing, qualified by compassion, with which he had trained his fastidiousness to regard human infirmity.

Lady Methuen paused at her safe distance just long enough to see that Honor was in fact, and with a pathetic unconsciousness, walking blindfold into the pit set for her destruction. The woman had simply stated that the child was very ill, giving the impression that it was from fatigue and want of food, and the natural instinct of pity, on which Anna had calculated, was obeyed.

Honor with her own hands was helping the mother to raise the shawl that covered the groaning child in her arms; and the next moment the contact would be so close as to make the absorption of the venomous poison of all but absolute certainty.

Her part was played; why should she wait any longer? The meeting had been casual, and Honor's own carriage was in waiting for her.

Anna crossed the road, and walked rapidly on; but not without giving, though she instinctively tried to resist the impulse, a backward glance.

That showed her that Honor had recoiled with horror from the sight which the uplifted shawl revealed, and even the sound of her voice in alarmed, indignant protest came to her ears.

When Anna reached the carriage, she bade the man join his mistress immediately, and then turned aside herself into a path across the fields, which led by a short cut to Methuen Place.

CHAPTER XL.

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?"

—ABT VOGLER.

REMORSE is supposed to be the inseparable adjunct of a great crime, but we doubt if this is not one of the numerous moral fallacies disproved by facts. Frustration of design, or inadequate results from the act achieved, have often assumed this aspect; but where success has crowned the deed—the perpetrator reaping the very harvest he desired to gather—remorse is of slow and uncertain development. At any rate its voice is never heard in the first flush of execution and eager waiting upon results, and Anna Methuen's mind was so constituted as to be almost impervious to absolute moral sensibility. There was rather the exhilaration of a contingent triumph in her mood.

The first thing she set herself to do on her return home was to search the file of newspapers since Philip's departure, or rather since the receipt of his last letter. Although habitually negligent of all kinds of public journals, Anna possessed that keen intuitive sagacity which some people exhibit in their rapid investigation of the daily broad-sheet, and soon discovered the paragraph she wanted in the half-column below the leaders, generally devoted to the chronicle of the doings of great people.

It stated that a fire had broken out in the village of Saxelby while Lord Sainsbury and a friend, who was stopping at the castle, were passing through; that both gentlemen had rendered the most valuable assistance, and that the latter had suffered the misfortune of having his hand seriously injured by a piece of falling timber, while heroically engaged in carrying a paralyzed old man out of one of the burning cottages.

The journalist added that the gentleman was supposed to be Sir Philip Methuen, "a name well known in the innermost ring of diplomatic and sacerdotal aristocracy."

For more than a week Anna suffered from a sense of

intolerable loneliness), aggravated by irritation and suspense. Even the daily absence of her husband had never been a matter of indifference to her; but this was the first time since their marriage that they had been separated so long, and her discomfort and excitement were increased by vague apprehensions concerning the extent and consequences of this accident, and by the pregnant secret she held in reserve.

It was on the evening of the tenth day after the receipt of Lord Sainsbury's letter that Philip returned home, Anna having received a telegram in advance. As soon as he had put off his travelling wraps, he came direct into the room where she was sitting to greet her, and her first glance showed her how much he was altered, considering how short the interval of separation had been. Also, it both troubled and annoyed her to observe that he carried his hand in a sling, for any sign of physical infirmity was obnoxious to her feelings. Still, and in spite of her latent resentments, the sight of him under any aspect was welcome to her eyes and heart; she got up eagerly from her seat as he entered, and went forward to meet him, stopping short as her quick glance took in these points of difference.

"Good heavens, Philip, how ill you look! I scarcely know you with that expression in your face—and—I am afraid to touch you! What a stupid thing you have done! As if any paralytic in the world could be worth your right hand!"

He smiled and kissed her, saying how much he regretted his long absence, and hoping she had not been too dull; and then he went toward the fire with an eagerness the intense cold of the weather might well justify, but which again struck her as contrary to his usual habits.

"I am ashamed of myself," he said, for "looking and feeling as I do, and accept your disgust as my desert. I think I was never ill nor hurt in my life before, and I had the notion that I was almost invulnerable to pain. I have found out my mistake."

"It is a very bad hurt, then? Perhaps you will be disabled—maimed for life?"

"The surgeon assures me to the contrary if I submit to the necessary precautions, which of course I shall do, as much, Anna, for your sake as my own. My hand is now cased in plaster of Paris."

Anna recoiled a little; but he was looking intently into the fire, and did not observe it.

"This is quite a blow to me," she answered. "I always looked upon you as a sort of god, Philip, and I cannot describe how it hurts me to see that line of pain on your forehead, and the pallid hue of your skin. Your eyes look as if you had not slept for a week! I always knew your philanthropy would end badly. Why could you not have let house and pauper burn? My belief is you will never recover the perfect use of that hand."

"In which case, Anna, you will hold yourself released from your marriage vows?"

She started and colored a little, and then suffered her face to assume an expression of wounded feeling.

"I did not mean to vex you," he said gravely; "only to remind myself and you on what foundations your love was built. The blast of disease would shatter them."

She looked at him with an intense, indefinable expression.

"I am not quite sure—with you. Sometimes you do me injustice. Do you consider it a crime or a shame that I take delight in your strength and your beauty, and am deeply grieved that they should have sustained injury?—only I refuse to believe that. But come, let us be practical! How do you manage to eat under these new conditions?"

She drew her seat close to him as she spoke, leaning forward with her elbow on her knee, her chin pillowed in her rosy palm, and her eyes sparkling with enchanting archness. It would have been hard to have resisted the passionate fondness of her glance, and he did not attempt to resist it. He kissed the lovely face as he answered, "I have lived on strong broths hitherto, with which I have been able to feed myself;" but she interrupted him gayly:

"Oh, but I should ask for nothing better than to feed you as the mother-bird feeds her fledgling! Do you remember at Fiesole how I used to try and persuade you to bite by turns at the same fig? But you always preferred one to yourself! If you will let me wait upon you like that, I will not mind so much."

He shook his head. "I should make a bad patient, little Anna. To accept such services becomingly would need an experience which I have never had. I would rather Duncan cut up my food, and I ate it with my left

hand in solitude." He stopped, then added seriously: "The last fortnight has taught me that pain and weakness are as distasteful to my natural temper as to yours; it may be because they bear the marks of their origin, and that shame and humiliation show through them. At least, few men could have stood more in need of the lesson that has been set me to learn."

"To what end?" she asked. "Could you be kinder to sick people, however offensive? or, perhaps, just because they are offensive?"

"Yes," he answered, "I could be kinder—as the future shall prove. I have often failed grievously, not so much, perhaps, in the outward act as in the inward sense of fellowship."

"I am very glad that there still remains some room for improvement, Philip, and that there is just this little touch of sympathy between us. Then, after all, what you instinctively love must be lovely?"

"It must be that assuredly, only so much more than perfect form and color and texture is needed to satisfy my meaning of the word."

He was silent for a moment, the gravity of his expression deepening to sadness. She thought he was thinking of his lost love, but his next words proved her mistake. "I have something to say, Anna, which I did not mean to say to-night, but am encouraged to do so by the gentleness of your present mood. It must not be the cause of any quarrel between us, for, understand plainly, I forgive you before I blame you."

For a moment Anna felt troubled. "What have I done?" she asked, and she knelt down by his side and clasped her hands upon his knees. Then she remembered that he was scarcely likely to be going to speak to her about Adrian; his blindness on that point had been absolute up to the time of his going to Saxelby, and he could have learned nothing since. Of that other deed, no human soul knew aught. She could venture to meet his eyes steadily.

"What have I done?" she repeated.

"Before this accident occurred, Lord Sainsbury and I ran up to town for a couple of days, and I went to South Audley Street to see what progress had been made in the house. I found the front drawing-room ceiling completed, and completed after the designs which I disliked in themselves, and had rejected on the ground of their

costing more than I had any right to pay. I was very angry."

"But you are not very angry now?" she whispered, and laying her lips on the hand she had taken.

"I am not angry now, because, since then, I have had time for cool reflection, and recognized the folly—how shall I put it, little Anna?—of expecting from you more than it is in your power to give. But for the future you must clearly understand that I never deny you anything without good reason, and that what I have once forbidden or commanded must not be set aside. Have you received the bill from Farini?"

"Not yet," she answered a little faintly; "and when I do, I am prepared to pay for it—out of my own purse."

"Then you must have the purse of Fortunatus, if it is equal to such costly expenditure as yours in dress and other womanish indulgences, and yet leaves you at liberty to give a check for £500 or £600! I believe that was what the man had the effrontery to ask?"

"And which you are disposed to pay?"

"If such was the contract it must be met, and I know of no other way of meeting it. Do you?"

He looked at her with suddenly aroused and stern attention.

There was in Anna a certain defiant recklessness which prompted her under the least provocation (and she regarded Philip's altered manner in the light of a gratuitous offence) to strain and test the bounds of his patience, and even to offend his moral sense by the avowed absence of all conscientious scruples of her own. Also, in the dim background of her consciousness, there lay a latent doubt whether the time might not arrive when circumstances would lead her to abandon her present life of restraint and decorum, and accept what her lover's loyalty might offer her. It would not, she thought, be altogether undesirable to awaken Methuen to the dread of a catastrophe, which would appear to him so terrible that there would be few things he would not be prepared to do to avert it. Therefore she answered with perfect composure, and meeting his eyes with unflinching steadiness:

"Yes, strange as you may think it, I do know of another way. I complained to Adrian Earle that you would not let me do as I liked in this trumpery matter,

and he proposed that Farini should paint the ceiling at his expense—as a wedding-gift.”

Philip changed color: there was something baffling in the effrontery of the statement.

“And the suggestion has been accepted by you without any perception of the insult offered or the disgrace incurred?” he asked; and to a finer sense there would have been an ominous suggestion in the forced quiet of his tone.

“Disgrace!” she repeated quickly. “I object to that word, and you must withdraw it, Philip.”

She got up from her knees as she spoke, and sat down in the chair she had quitted, with an air of justly offended dignity.

“No,” he said, “I shall not withdraw it; but I accept my share of the shame. Where is this to end, Anna? You are always giving me fresh proofs of your insensibility to honor and duty, till I dread the discovery which may await me to-morrow. Until now I had retained the hope that you at least respected your position as my wife, and would scarcely have submitted your name and mine to so insufferable a humiliation. Have you forgotten that this man was your lover?”

A peculiar smile passed over her lips. She would like to have answered, “I am not likely to forget that of which he reminds me continually;” but in view of Methuen’s deep though carefully controlled anger she durst not venture on the outrage. She contented herself with as great but a more guarded provocation.

“I think,” she said, “when you scold me like this there are some things you forget to take into account. You forget that our standards are so different it is not fair to use the same gauge. The supreme duty I recognize is not obedience to hard laws of right and wrong, but the duty of being as little miserable as your conduct and opinions will let me. Adrian Earle thinks, and others besides him think, that I am a very unhappy and neglected girl, and he comes here very often. There is nothing secret in his doing so; but it happens that you are so seldom at home—and when you are, you are never in my company—that you do not know what all the rest of the world knows quite well. Perhaps if you were just a little less taken up with your own affairs—say, with helping to make Lord Sainsbury’s reputation, or with

religious observances which tell equally on your health and your temper, or in brooding over what I took away from you—it would be better both for your own future and mine. As it is, I don't think that any one who knows what our life together really is, will blame me very much if I look elsewhere for what you deny me."

She stopped breathless: would he resent her audacity, or betray the pain she felt sure she had inflicted?—for who knew better than herself how to apply the lash where he was most sensitive?

There was a brief interval before he answered, but when he did it was with that complete absence of passion which had often stung her to the quick before.

"In other words," he said, "you venture to threaten that you hold my honor at the caprice of your temper or your vengeance? It is of no use to be angry with you, Anna, for I know of no instinct or feeling to which I can make any effectual appeal—only this last outrage must be withstood at any cost."

"But," she interrupted, stimulated by his self-command to further insult, "you do not consider that, in that case, you could perhaps get a dispensation, when, you must allow, good would come out of evil."

"Stop there!" he exclaimed sternly. "That is the line I have forbidden you to cross, and am prepared to defend. Only, Anna, believe this—that no good could come to me that was bought by your loss and shame. Such as you are, I shall keep you always and protect you against yourself."

He waited a moment, whether for answer from her lips, or to order the words on his own did not appear, but presently he added:

"I confess now, as I have confessed before, that I have been to blame in my behavior toward you, forgetting when angry that your conduct cannot cancel your rights or free me from a single obligation. But it is my solemn purpose to make amends for the past by the future. Put my resolutions to the proof, Anna; and do not wantonly speak of wrecking your own life in order the more effectually to wreck mine. Even to you remorse and pity would come."

He went up to her and put his hand kindly on her shining hair.

"Child," he said, with a tender earnestness that she had hardly ever heard from his lips before, "you gave

yourself to me, body and soul, and, under God, I will keep the deposit safe! Comfort me, Anna, with the assurance that this devil's whisper has had no real power over your heart."

She neither looked up nor moved. On the contrary, she shivered a little and drew herself away from his touch. She knew her own weakness so well that she doubted if she had lifted her eyes to his face whether the kindness of it would not have broken down her pride and resentment, and forced her to slip from her chair to his feet, as she had so often done as a child, and sob out her penitence and her love.

But that could never be again! She might forget, as she had forgotten for a time that night in the joy of his return, the unbridged gulf between them; but there it would stand for ever, and no charity or kindness on his side, or compunction on hers, could overpass it.

Of what worth was his goodness to her, or even, if that were possible, his love?

The spontaneous passion of his heart had been given elsewhere, and the laborious growth of duty and religion had no value in her eyes. Did any woman breathe who would have prized his love higher than herself?

Then another thought struck her brain, and vibrated through every answering nerve. Even already it might be that she had vindicated her wrongs and that the punishment was working in secret which had been so righteously earned. Fool as she was and always had been where Philip Methuen was concerned, the limits of her endurance had been reached.

It was Honor Aylmer whom he loved, and it was precisely because he loved her that he was able to show such tolerance to herself. This was a crime she refused to forgive, or to take the insult of his pity as amends.

"You are waiting for me to make a proper answer," she said at last, after a long interval, during which he had watched the changes of her face with acute solicitude, "and I have none to make. Honor to my mind is only binding where mutual love exists, and even you do not pretend that this is our case. Do not let us talk about it any more."

"Agreed! It shall be deeds, not words, Anna. I will prove to you that I love you."

"I am not easy to deceive," was her answer, "although I grant you are almost perfect in some forms of deceit.

Any way I hold myself free, and will give you no promises for the future."

And she rose, looked with mocking assurance into his eyes as she passed him, and went slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER XLI.

"In brief, acquit thee bravely: play the man.
Look not on pleasures as they come but go.
Defer not the least virtue: life's poore span
Make not an ell, by trifling in thy woe.
If thou do ill, the joy fades, not the pains.
If well: the pain doth fade, the joy remains."

—GEORGE HERBERT.

THE next day, after a night chiefly spent in painful consideration of the situation, Methuen called at Earles-court and asked to see Adrian.

It happened that Adrian was sitting in Oliver's room when the servant brought him this message. As soon as the door was closed again, the younger brother said eagerly:

"Will you see him? Depend upon it there is trouble at home, and, after his mode, he is come to make some appeal to your good feeling. You will bear in mind that there is not a member of this family whom he has not wronged more or less?"

"I will not forget," was the answer, "that there are those outside this family whom he has wronged far worse. You need not be afraid."

He went at once into the room where Methuen was waiting for him. The servant had shown him into the great drawing-room, though Philip would have given much to escape the cruel recollections which filled it.

As the door opened to admit Adrian, he turned from the deep window in which he had been standing, looking out into the frost-bound gardens, and crossed the room half-way to meet him.

"You will see that I cannot shake hands," he said courteously: "I am still feeling a great deal of pain and inconvenience from my accident, but I am very glad you have been willing to give me this interview. I may as well say at once that I am come on that sort of business which, fifty years ago, was decided in another way. I

do not send you a challenge, Adrian, but I bring one in my own person."

"Ah!" returned Adrian, with an affected exaggeration of his usual languor of manner, and sinking slowly into the depth of the cushioned chair near him, he plunged his hands into his pockets and extended his legs with an air of easy indifference. "I remember in the old days, Methuen, you piqued yourself on your directness of speech; it seems even to have improved with the course of time. You look, too, as you are apt to do, desperately in earnest; but I give you fair warning that I am not in a mood to be either bullied or cajoled."

"You are secure," returned the other, "against any attempt at either. My object is very simple; but it is one I preferred to accomplish outside my own house. I wish you distinctly to understand that your visits at Methuen Place are not acceptable to me, and that they must cease. Any further expression of feeling is, I think, on all sides superfluous."

Adrian smiled in his light sarcastic way.

"I congratulate you, Methuen, on the favorable opportunity you have chosen to pass this insult upon me and on one whom I will not name, but for whom I resent it more strongly than for myself. You have fortified yourself not only against the change in public opinion, which might have been got over, but by a physical disqualification which invests you with a very safe immunity. For the rest, your intimation is not to be misunderstood, and it is one that no gentleman ever fails to regard. But—the world is wide outside Methuen Place."

"Yes," returned Philip, with the quietness of manner which was habitual to him, and which always suggested the consciousness of strength, not only in his purpose but in his own power of carrying it out. "I have not overlooked the limitations of my authority, neither have I yet said all that I came here prepared to say. If I bring myself to speak of a contingency which no man can contemplate without shame, it is because we have both known Anna Trevelyan from a child, and are aware how entirely her conduct is at the bidding of her feelings. There is another consideration, Adrian, which no gentleman fails to regard: were you to be so ill-advised as to induce my wife to leave her home, it would not be in your power to offer her the poor reparation which the

world exacts in such cases. Circumstances can scarcely have so changed you as to make it possible you should try and persuade the woman that you love to a life of unredeemed dishonor."

"Not in order to redeem her from a life of intolerable misery and neglect?"

"Such is not the case. I state this in justice to myself, not with the idea that you will accept it. But even supposing that it were true, suffering is more tolerable to a woman than shame."

Adrian looked up with sudden passion.

"The shame, such as it is, would be neither hers nor mine, but yours, who first took her from me and then rendered her life insufferable by your cruelty. You squeeze and fling aside every heart that trusts you, Methuen; but you shall not do this with Anna Trevelyan's! I give you fair warning: if she continues to stand in need of comfort, and it is in my power to comfort her, no human endeavor will suffice to keep us apart. You are free to defend your own honor in your own way, or to do the other thing if you like it better—the latter being probably the course you will choose to adopt."

"I think," said Philip, "we had better leave these alternatives to the determination of events. The matter under discussion is one of life and death to me, and your little gratuitous insults, Adrian, hurt me no more than the blows of a wayward child. I do not plead with you for myself, but for your own sake and—for hers. Have you no sense of what it must cost me to do this?"

"So lively a sense that, personally, I would prefer the figurative death you speak of to the humiliation!"

"But so would not I! To save Anna from the insufferable consequences of her own madness, or rather of the madness to which you would tempt her, I would submit to a much deeper humiliation than to expostulate with the friend I have lost. And it is not only the blight that will fall upon the life which I am bound to protect from evil that I consider, but the equal ruin of your own. There is no future possible to the man who is bound by such ties as you desire. The poison eats into the soul."

"Have you discharged your conscience?" was Adrian's answer, "for we will end this. If the subject is not too unpalatable for you to discuss, it is for me; and moral saws and social platitudes never yet served but to clinch the resolution to go wrong. From your lips I can't

stand them! I repeat once more, that whatever sin or sorrow or shame befall your wife, and the man who loves her better than his own honor and profit, will lie at your door. I promise nothing for the future, except that I will not cross the threshold of any house where you are master."

He got up as he spoke, as if to show that he considered the matter ended; but at the same moment, as Philip remembered had occurred on a former occasion, the door was opened and Miss Earle entered.

"Excuse me," she said with her usual rapid but clear articulation, "if I interrupt some important discussion; but I am very anxious on a certain point, and came in to consult Adrian. He is generally able to take things coolly. That you are here, Sir Philip, need make no difference—your advice may be better worth having than his. I am in great trouble about Honor."

"Is Miss Aylmer ill?"

"I will not allow she is ill; but she has certainly not been well for the last two or three days, and this morning there are symptoms of restlessness and excitement so unlike herself, as to cause me considerable alarm. Yesterday she refused to see Dr. Farquhar; to-day she is quite willing to do so; but that will not satisfy me now, and I came in to consult Adrian as to who was the best man to summon from town."

"Are there any other marked symptoms you can mention? Forgive my interference, but some elementary knowledge of medicine was part of our curriculum at St. Sulpice, and I have myself served in several of the hospitals in Paris. Restlessness and excitement point at once to fever. In that case, under Adrian's correction"—with a slight smile—"there is no man whose reputation is higher than Sir Wilfred Jenkyns. I have immediate business in Trichester, and shall think it a favor if you will allow me to despatch your telegram."

"Thank you!" said Miss Earle, with unusual warmth; "you are the very friend in need we want. But—you will pardon my neglect, I know—I have not yet asked how you are after your accident, nor expressed my regret to see you look so ill. You cannot be riding, of course?"

"No; but I have a pair of horses, and they are better than in the old times."

The careless words suggested to each what to one at

least was almost an insufferable recollection. Miss Earle's heart warmed toward Methuen as she detected the sudden change of expression, and his almost instant mastery of the weakness.

"I will go at once," he said. "Is Dr. Farquhar here now?"

"I sent for him two hours ago, but he is not arrived; at that time I was not seriously uneasy, but every hour since has increased my anxiety. No doubt he is with some other patient, who needs him, I devoutly hope, more than Honor; but it is hard to wait in these cases."

"I will call upon him again as soon as I get into the town. But no doubt he will have been here long before that, and have relieved your anxiety."

Miss Earle, in the sudden warmth of her gratitude, accompanied Methuen herself into the hall. He would have gone direct to the carriage without waiting to put on his cloak, but she would not allow it.

"The cold is intense," she said, "and I do not see how you are going to get into it without assistance. You are one of the men, Sir Philip, who defy fashion, and gain by the process. Who but yourself drapes himself in a garment of that fashion?"

"It is not coxcombry, be quite sure," he answered, touching his arm; "but on account of my present infirmity. I will not lose a moment on the road." He stooped toward the delicate little lady and raised her hand to his lips. "Remember," he added in a low tone, "that my anxiety will be intense."

"I will send you word in the morning."

"That will not satisfy me. If I send to inquire to-night, may I rely on the latest information?"

She nodded and dismissed him, standing a moment to watch the carriage out of sight.

"I will not tell my poor Honor," she said to herself, as she went back to the girl's room; "but for the first time to-day I seem to understand that it is reasonable for any woman to be fond of Philip Methuen."

It was eminently characteristic of Philip, that in spite of his profound anxiety and the increasing pain in his injured hand, he had never succeeded better in concealing his personal feelings or in rendering his society acceptable to his wife than on the evening of the day after his return from Earlescourt and Trichester.

Mrs. Sylvestre would have found a ready explanation of his success in his Jesuitical training, and doubtless the severe discipline of his earlier years had something to do with it; but also it is only fair to credit that discipline with the growth and development of principles which made the welfare of the wayward girl he had married a matter of such supreme importance as to keep every other sentiment and instinct in check.

It was equally characteristic of Anna that she yielded herself up to his influence as fully as if there had been no alleged quarrel and alienation on her part, coolly accepting the pleasure of the hour, while reserving the right of outrage or offence at the next provocation.

It was beyond her power to be otherwise than soothed and flattered by his tender kindness, although precisely the same causes of repudiation existed to-day as yesterday; and on the strength of it she had asked him to sing to her after dinner, to the charming little piano which was part of the new furniture of her morning-room, in which she never allowed the fire to go out. She had made the same request continually from the time of their marriage, and this was the first time he had acceded to it.

She reminded him that such had been the case, as she sat down to the piano and opened the score of the "Huguenots."

"Ah, well!" he answered, "we are going to pass a sponge over my omissions and transgressions in the past. You shall never in the future ask me any more in vain."

Anna thought she had never heard him sing with such exquisite precision and effect. The pleasure it gave her was almost too poignant; and after he had gone through the solo parts of *Raoul*, she leaned back in her chair and lifted her beautiful, softened face to his.

"Philip, I adore you!" she said. "Were you as ugly as a satyr, you would be able with that voice to lure any woman's heart into your hands, but—as it is! Now, if you are not tired, and have a mind to make Christian and Catholic of me at once, I will play some of the music of Bach's 'Passion,' not as you play it for yourself, but to the best of my ability."

It was very late before Anna's enthusiasm was exhausted; but at length Methuen found himself alone.

So great was the latent excitement that he had been

holding rigorously in check, that he began to walk up and down the room, a habit to which he was by no means addicted. With or without reason, he felt that heavy weight of foreboding in respect to Honor Aylmer's illness, which it is at times equally impossible to explain or throw off. He had not mentioned to his wife his visit to Earlescourt, nor the intelligence he had received, for obvious reasons, saying to himself that he would wait for the night's report before doing so. He had sent his uncle's old valet, Duncan, who was now his own faithfully attached servant, to the house with a note addressed to Miss Earle, and had given orders that the man, on his return, was to bring the answer to him in person. There had been plenty of time for his messenger to go and come back, and as one half-hour succeeded another and still he did not appear, Methuen seemed scarcely able to endure the tension of his anxiety.

And yet no one who had seen him would have thought this to be the case. He had soon ceased his impatient walking of the room, and was now sitting in a chair—as motionless as if power of motion were extinct—with his elbow on the arm of it, and his hand shading his eyes.

He was solemnly planning his future: telling himself that so soon as the news reached him of Honor Aylmer's safety, he would close that episode in his life forever, as he had always known was the best and only right way. He would not even trust himself to see her; but he would write her a few lines of eternal farewell, binding on his conscience. Then he would take Anna out of England, beyond Adrian's influence, and devote himself to her service in such a fashion that every desire of her being should be met—all the exigencies of her passion in every phase of sensuous and selfish requirement—so as to make guilt and disloyalty impossible.

If, as the slow years passed and the fervid heat of her youth declined, it became possible to lift her to higher aims and a finer happiness by the force of his affection and constancy, he would take such a result as the crown of his life, as God's assurance that his reluctant martyrdom had been accepted.

Spiritual ambition had been his temptation and snare: he had hoped, in a far-off alien land, to build up his name in the future as one who had dared much, endured

much, and achieved much, winning proselytes to the Cross through blood and fire. But that door of eternal life had been shut in his face; his way hedged up within safe narrow limits; no risk of life or limb—no chance of proving his devotion to Christ by his readiness to die for Him.

Only, the cup put into his hand, which looked to others as if it held the very wine of life, was known to himself as a draught of such unparalleled bitterness, that hitherto he had tasted and refused to drink. Such revolt was of the past. Henceforward he would take up his despised cross and bear it to the end.

There was a knock at the door. Philip rose and opened it, receiving a scrap of paper from Duncan's hands. He saw the man waited, as if expecting to be questioned.

"You have been a long time," he said; "I suppose you had to wait for this?"

"Over an hour and a half, Sir Philip. I never saw a house so terribly upset—the poor lady, they say, is very bad."

The words smote Methuen like a sword; but he asked no further questions, nodding dismissal to the man, and closing the door again as he retired. Then he slowly retraced his steps to the table and held Miss Earle's message, which was written in pencil on the back of an envelope, under the lamp. It ran thus:

"Sir Wilfred Jenkyns has come and gone. Honor is sick with small-pox, and I read in his face that the case is a bad one. Pity us! Do not come to the house, for Anna's sake."

There are some burdens which the strongest cannot bear alone.

When the gray winter daylight dawned, Philip Methuen was still on his knees, almost prostrate before the altar in the chapel. The hours which had intervened had been one stern conflict of strenuous human desire against the conceivable, though as yet undeclared, will of God. His prayers had only one burden—"Let this cup pass from me!"

Dumb submission to the mysterious decrees of Providence—absolute effacement of personal will and choice—were the spiritual conditions it had been his life's work to attain; but all his soul seemed swept backward and downward in the blast of this terrible calamity.

When he at length, haggard and exhausted, brought his vigil to a close, he was conscious that he had scarcely gained a single step toward submission.

"Not my will but Thine be done!" sounded to him like words heard in the clear rarefied air of an immeasurable distance—the distance which separates the God from the man.

CHAPTER XLII.

"The wind sounds only in opposing straits,
The sea beside the shore; man's spirit rends
Its quiet only up against the ends
Of want and oppositions, loves and hates—
Where, worked and worn by passionate debates,
And losing by the loss it apprehends,
The flesh rocks round and every breath it sends
Is ravelled to a sigh."

—E. B. BROWNING.

BEFORE Philip and Anna met the next morning, the latter knew that her vengeance had taken effect, and that Honor Aylmer was lying sick with that disorder which is the most dreaded, because the most repulsive, in the long list of calamities to which flesh is heir.

Her maid, when she came to dress her, brought the intelligence, which Duncan, as a matter of course, had spread in the servants' hall on his return.

So great was Lady Methuen's excitement and anxiety, that she could not refrain from asking, though her pride rebelled at the admission of ignorance, "And what was Duncan's business at Earlescourt late last night?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell, my lady. It was Sir Philip's business, and Duncan is always very close about the master's affairs."

Anna's cheek burned with anger: it was as much as she could do to refrain from boxing the girl's ears, but she succeeded in maintaining an air of haughty indifference, as dignity and prudence demanded.

To her great disappointment, Philip did not appear at breakfast, though this was by no means an uncommon occurrence, his hours being so much earlier than hers; but the desire to see what effect was produced upon him by the news, which must necessarily be his as well as hers by this time, was so imperious, that she ventured on an unusual step.

She sent for Duncan, and inquired how he had become informed of Miss Aylmer's condition.

There was not one of the old staff of servants who regarded Anna with favor; the affectionate loyalty they felt for their master stimulated their feeling against her, whom they regarded as having forced herself, to his cost, into a position which belonged by right to another; for it is scarcely necessary to say that the circumstances which led to her marriage were known (more or less) to every member of the household. Also, Duncan had been in attendance in Sir Giles' sick-room when Philip had led Honor into it on the day of his uncle's death, an incident which needed no explanation to any onlooker, and had been exhaustively discussed in the servants' hall. Added to this, the wanton dismissal of Mrs. Gibson was resented almost as an infamy and a crime.

It therefore occurred to the man, although he had received no hint of secrecy, that it might be as well to reserve the truth in respect to his last night's errand.

"He was at Earlescourt," he answered, "on business of his own—several of the servants there had been his friends for years—and Miss Aylmer's illness was the only subject of conversation at the hall table."

Anna's piercing glance fixed itself on his face with severe scrutiny; but it would have been hard if Scotch wariness could not have defied her. Duncan encountered her gaze with a respectful determination, which in turn almost discomfited his mistress.

"Was Sir Philip gone out?" was her next inquiry.

She knew pretty well to the contrary, as it was his custom, when he went out early without seeing her, to leave some intimation of his movements; but the point she wished to ascertain was, whether he thought of going out.

"Sir Philip was not out: he was lying on the couch in his dressing-room," and then the man added with some hesitation:

"Did Lady Methuen think it was wise of the master to go on with that hand of his, without further medical advice? He was suffering terribly."

"It is not a subject I am disposed to discuss with any one but Sir Philip himself," said Anna haughtily; and Duncan left her with a deepened sense of dislike and distrust.

"It is not the pain of his hand from which Philip is

suffering," said the girl to herself, as she slowly paced the solitary room, stopping at intervals at the windows to look at the scene outside. The snow was falling after its silent, stealthy fashion, covering the garden-walks and lawns and trees, and the sloping roofs of some distant outbuildings which her keen vision could distinguish, with the exquisite deposit, and transforming the familiar landscape to a new beauty, which, however, chilled and repelled her.

"If he knew!" was the thought that pressed upon her mind—"if he knew!" and involuntarily she put her hand to her head as though the idea weighed upon her brain.

"Am I frightened already?" she pursued—"frightened because I have won the stakes for which I played! Not I! I can think of it all—her pain and terror and distress—without one touch of pity or relenting, for she has hurt me more! I shall be able to watch what he suffers too, and make no sign, because I shall remember what he has made me bear. I will forgive her when the beauty which tempted him is gone, and him too, the first time I see the humiliating pity in his eyes. It is easy to forgive what we have revenged."

But time, even more than usual, hung heavy on her hands. Her anxiety to see her husband was intense, in order that she might satisfy her aching curiosity as to the way in which he took this unexpected blow; but she did not venture to intrude upon his privacy. She did go upstairs as a diversion to her weariness, and even passed the door of his dressing-room, stopping and listening a moment, but she could not detect a single sound. Then she took some weary turns through the central gallery, examining the faded panels afresh, and pausing at each window to mark the new effects produced by the snow.

In this situation she was able to command a view of the front entrance to the house, and presently observed, to her surprise, that Dr. Farquhar's neat little brougham had just stopped before it, and that he was in the act of getting out of his carriage.

The doctor was a great favorite with Lady Methuen, as she was well aware that he had a very strong admiration for herself, and that he entertained the opinion—which, in spite of her manifold claims to distinction, was not generally held in their circle—that Sir Philip Meth-

uen was a very fortunate man to have drawn such a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

There were, however, to-day some circumstances which qualified her satisfaction at this unexpected break in her morning's monotony—first, a sudden fear that leaped into her heart that Philip might be more ill than he acknowledged, and had secretly sent for him; and again, that being, as she knew, in attendance on Honor's sick-bed, there might be some danger of infection.

As she passed Methuen's door she called to him that Dr. Farquhar was in the house, and then ran half-way down the broad, shallow staircase, pausing on one of the landing stages, and leaning over the balusters till he had entered the hall. Then she flung him a gracious greeting from this point of vantage:

"Is it safe for me to come down and shake hands with you, Dr. Farquhar, and have the delightful gossip that I am longing to enjoy? You must know I have a horrible dread of infection! Is the news true about—about the trouble at Earlescourt?"

"It is quite true," he said gravely; "but you may venture to come down. I do not bring more infection from this sick-bed than from others, when Lady Methuen has experienced no such anxiety. You may rely upon it, I have taken every possible precaution."

She heard the door open above her, and the next moment Methuen came out; he stopped beside her for a moment, and wished her good-morning with so completely his usual tone and manner, that she looked up at him in surprise, and then he went downstairs to greet the doctor, without betraying any symptom of anxiety or disturbance.

"It is bitterly cold," he said; "we must not keep you talking in the hall—but Lady Methuen and I are deeply grateful for the kindness of this visit." He turned and offered his hand to Anna, who was now close beside him, and together they all three entered the morning-room, the door of which stood open, and the glare and blaze of its great fire seemed to send a welcome in advance.

"How is Miss Aylmer this morning?" continued Methuen; "you have just left the house, I conclude. Have you better news to give us?—you know how close our intimacy with the family has been—we are deeply concerned."

He spoke with perfect quietness, standing by the fire-

side, and still retaining Anna's hand in his, perfectly aware that her eyes were searching his face for signs of weakness, but also that he was able to bear her scrutiny.

Dr. Farquhar hesitated a moment before he answered, during which he bestowed on Methuen one of his swift glances of investigation. The morning bath and careful toilet had done much to remove the traces of his night's vigil, and his practised faculty of self-mastery enabled him to assume his ordinary manner with scarcely a hair's-breadth of variation; but for all that there were certain physical indications not too subtle to be detected by the keen eyes bent upon him.

"You are enough of a physician yourself, Sir Philip," he answered, "to know that no definite opinion can be arrived at in the present stage of the disease. To-morrow Jenkyns comes again—for the satisfaction of the family as much as the benefit of the patient—by that time the eruption will fully have declared itself, and we may be able to foresee its probable course. That is, according to our lights, which events discredit as often as not."

"In Paris," said Methuen, "masks of calamine or gum are constantly employed to prevent disfigurement. I do not know what is the practice in this country; but I think if the idea were suggested to Miss Earle she would be eager to have it adopted. Do you not think it is worth trying?"

Dr. Farquhar shrugged his shoulders. "Such palliatives are useful just where they are least wanted—in mild cases where the patient has not lost the power of self-control. I may as well say at once, in regard to Miss Aylmer, that all the indications point to a severe type of the malady."

Anna had pulled away her hand from Philip's with an angry gesture, regarding his solicitude on Honor's behalf, however openly and temperately expressed, as an outrage upon her own feelings. There was a gleam of triumph in her eyes as she glanced at him to see the effect of the doctor's last words, but he made no sign. As he remained silent, she ventured to ask:

"Does any one know how Miss Aylmer caught this dreadful disease?"

"The young lady is not in a condition to be questioned on the subject, though I believe she has made some

communication to Miss Earle. Singularly enough, a case has just been admitted into the infirmary at Trichester."

He was going on, but at this point an interruption occurred by a servant introducing Mr. Sylvestre. The vicar was well wrapped up in overcoat, muffler, and woollen gloves, and held his hat in his hand.

"What weather!" he exclaimed, when the first greetings were over; "and we are going to have more of it. We shall rejoice in a white Christmas this year. I came in, Sir Philip, to know if you would give me a lift to Crawford—you have not forgotten, I hope, that to-day's board is a special one. The distress in the borough increases every day, and the Guardians must be induced to extend their system of out-door relief. We shall want you. But perhaps you are disabled by your accident?" and a look of disappointment clouded his face.

"I am very much disabled," said Philip, smiling; "but not quite enough to strike work altogether, only we must ask Anna for an early luncheon before we go. Perhaps Dr. Farquhar can stay and join us?"

And then he added in a lower tone, addressing the doctor, "Under these circumstances, I think the examination of my hand must stand over until to-morrow."

Anna looked up quickly, and an expression of lively concern came into the vicar's face.

"That is as you please," answered the doctor dryly. "I have not yet undertaken the case, and am to succeed a great surgeon, the latchet of whose shoes I am unworthy to unloose. I conclude, then, you are suffering less pain?"

"Not that; only the matter would take some time, and scarcely be a desirable introduction to a board meeting at Crawford. Can you make it convenient to call here again to-morrow—on your way back from Earlescourt?"

The arrangement was agreed to, and then the vicar and doctor, in the interval before luncheon, fell again to discussing the circumstances of Honor Aylmer's illness, which was at the moment the point of chief interest in the neighborhood. Philip had left the room under some excuse of giving orders about the horses, and after a few minutes' hesitation Anna followed him.

She found him in the dining-room, where the table was already laid for luncheon, and he was in the act of

drinking a glass of water as she entered. The circumstance, trivial as it was, gave her a pang; water was Methuen's invariable restorative, and it meant that he felt the need of it. She went up close to him and put her hand on his arm.

"I have a little question to ask," she said, and her voice was low and measured, "and I have the comfort of knowing that you always speak the truth—when did you first hear of Honor Aylmer's illness?"

"From Miss Earle's own lips yesterday morning. I had business at Earlescourt, and chanced to see her. Also, I took the telegram to Sir Wilfred Jenkyns to Trichester and despatched it. Need I say I would have done the same for the veriest stranger?"

"Ah! I think I understand. You could not of course know then that it was anything serious, so that you were able to sing and be pleasant to me in the evening—you were very pleasant!—or you might have had some end to serve by deceiving me—" She paused as if considering. "Probably you saw Duncan before you went to bed last night, and heard the dreadful news. No news, I suppose, Philip, could be more dreadful for you to hear?"

"You are ungenerous," he said quietly; "but perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect otherwise. For the rest, you have guessed right. I not only saw Duncan last night, but it was I that sent him to Earlescourt. You are now in possession of all the facts."

"Not quite all," she answered, and her glance quickened. "Tell me if you went to bed last night?"

"Nay," he said, with an indefinable smile, "you exceed your rights. It is no part of my duty to give my soul into your hands."

"I am answered! You have looked ill and altered since you came home from Saxelby, but not as you look to-day. Shall I wish that woman to live who can bring into your face the expression I can read in spite of all your disguises? Even now, although you are tormented with pain almost greater than you can bear, you are willing to bear it for twenty-four hours longer, in order to make sure of the latest news from her sick-bed! I will not bear it!"

"It is not so," he said coldly. "Under any circumstances we should certainly inform ourselves daily of the condition of so near a neighbor and friend. The reason

I alleged was the true one—I should be too unfit for work, after having submitted to the inevitable pain of an examination. But it is time to fetch our friends in to luncheon.”

“One word before they come. You will return to dinner and sit with me to-night? You will remember that if I ask you to sing you have promised not to refuse? Perhaps I shall ask you.”

“And I shall certainly refuse! All pledges are given under unexpressed conditions of possibility and decency. I am quite sure, from my present sensations, that by the time I return I shall be physically unfit to do what you suggest; and were it otherwise, I should refuse, from feelings of sympathy and affection with our unhappy friends at Earlescourt.”

At the same moment the gong sounded, and Dr. Farquhar and the Vicar entered the dining-room, the latter exclaiming:

“We must consume our food in ten minutes, Sir Philip, if we are to preserve our character at the Board. Anna, my dear, I drink to the recovery of your friend!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

“Soft sounds, that breathe of Heaven, most mild, most powerful,
What seek ye here?—Why will ye come to me
In deepest gloom immersed? Oh! rather speak
To hearts of soft and penetrable mould!
I hear your message, but I have not faith.”

—*Faust.*

THE next few days were among the most unhappy and dreary that Lady Methuen had ever spent.

Philip dined and passed several hours of the evening with her on his return from the board meeting, but he did so simply by an act of heroism. And she, seeing that he could hardly sustain the pain he was suffering, herself suggested, with ill-concealed vexation, that he should go early to his own room.

It was nearly two o'clock of the following day before Dr. Farquhar appeared, and Anna, who had been watching for his carriage for hours, went out eagerly into the hall to receive him.

“How cruel you have been!” she exclaimed. “I thought you would never come—I am almost beside myself with anxiety!”

"I have no good news to give you," was his grave reply. "Things are going very badly with Miss Aylmer; Jenkyns has consented to stay the night."

Anna turned a little pale, and then threw up her head with her accustomed gesture of impatience:

"Of course that is very sad, only—people who have been properly vaccinated do not die of small-pox. I was not thinking about the Earlescourt people at all, but of Sir Philip, who has not known how to live through the last twenty-four hours. I think he will die if you do not manage to relieve him of that pain! He bears it, of course, like a martyr at the stake—only the martyrs, you will remember, always give in at last."

"Ah! my dear lady, your affection exaggerates the case, but I will do what I can. Please let me have Duncan in attendance—he is invaluable in a sick-room, and I may want his help. Send him up at once with the little black bag he will find in the carriage."

A look of terror came into Anna's beautiful eyes.

"I shall go out of doors," she said. "Yes, in spite of the snow"—answering the doctor's wondering look. "I could not stay in the house while—while this is going on. I think if I were to hear him shriek or groan—do men ever shriek or groan, doctor?—I should die!"

"But, my dear Lady Methuen, this is nonsense! I am not going to amputate a limb, but simply, I trust, to relieve one of pain, by freeing it from the plaster cast in which, in my opinion, it was encased far too soon. That will give ease at once."

He beamed upon her as he spoke, liking her all the better for her extravagance, and thinking, as he had often thought before, how the man he had come to attend seemed to pick up all the good things of life at once.

He went up alone to Philip's dressing-room, the latter rising quickly from his chair to meet him.

"At last!" he said.

Just as the good doctor had misinterpreted Anna's anxiety, he now did the same by Methuen's, supposing he referred to the late hour of his visit, and began rapidly to excuse himself.

"I did not in the least mean that. I am quite sure you are come as soon as you could. I mean—what news of Miss Aylmer?"

Whether it was the look of wearied pain or of dumb

anguish in the man's eyes which induced a sudden weakness in Dr. Farquhar's stout heart it is hard to say, but he was certainly guilty of a very unusual professional prevarication.

"Really, Sir Philip," he answered testily, "it is quite impossible to commit one's self to a definite opinion in this way from day to day! There is so little change that Jenkyns stays all night to watch the case. Everything under heaven that can be done for her will be done, and I still trust our efforts will be crowned with success."

"Still? I understand."

He could scarcely have grown paler, nor did a muscle of his face move; but the pupils of the eyes which were looking straight into the doctor's dilated and contracted, and he clenched the fingers of his left hand so strongly that the nails entered the flesh—but this action did not appear. After a pause he said: "There is one thing, Farquhar, I wish you clearly to understand—I must see her once again! How does Miss Earle bear up?"

"Like the true metal she is! Commend me to these small, delicate women, who look as if a puff of wind would blow them away, for pluck and endurance. We have two first-rate nurses; but that brave, fond little creature is not to be displaced."

"But it must distress Miss Aylmer very much if she sees her aunt wearing out her strength in her service?"

Methuen looked steadily at the doctor as he said these words, who changed color a little.

"You are setting a trap for the unwary, and may as well have the truth now—Miss Aylmer knows nothing of what goes on about her. The fever is very high; unless there is some change within the next three days, it would be only a useless giving of pain for any friend to see her."

"That is for her friends to decide. I rely upon your honor as a man, Farquhar, outside all professional scruples, that you will give me warning in time."

"I pledge my word, Sir Philip Methuen, since you exact it," returned the other coldly. He was thinking of the look of terror in Anna's face and the passionate expression of her anxiety.

"Shall we now proceed to your own business?" he continued dryly. "Lady Methuen gave me to understand that you were suffering acute pain; but that is evidently the conclusion of her own extreme anxiety."

"I am ashamed to have cost her so much. I have never before had much experience of pain; but I think—ignorantly, no doubt—that no suffering can be worse than what I have endured the last three days."

"I shall be able to judge better about that presently. It is now quite understood that you put yourself entirely in my hands?"

Philip signified assent, and Duncan having now brought in what was wanted, Dr. Farquhar began at once to break and remove the plaster cast in which the hand was embedded.

The whole hand had been frightfully contused, and several of the smaller bones were broken: it had been exquisitely set and bandaged, but inflammation and even suppuration had supervened, which were dangerously exacerbated by the close pressure of the rigid plaster glove. In spite of his long training of professional reserve, an exclamation of horror almost escaped the doctor's lips as it was at length fully exposed to view. With exquisite dexterity he had unbound and redressed the hand, calling in the merciful aid of his lancet to relieve the tension of pain at certain points, and then binding it round with layers of wet linen, and carefully instructing Duncan in the application of the same; but in spite of his skill it was only by a powerful exercise of will that Methuen did not swoon under the extremity of the anguish.

"I shall have a meaner opinion of Sir Digby Wyall's intelligence from this day henceforward," remarked Dr. Farquhar, as, having brought his work to an end, he leaned back restfully in his chair and wiped the perspiration from his brows. "I should have said that no man who knew his business would have built up that hand at such a stage of the process."

"The fault was entirely mine," said Philip. "I was so anxious to return home, that I overruled his judgment."

"But that is a defeat to which no wise man suffers himself to submit," returned the other dryly, "and you have taken the consequences. I am now going to order you to bed, and to lay my commands upon you that you do not leave it till I give you permission. Absolute rest is now your only chance. It will be Duncan's function to sit by your bedside, and follow the instructions I have given him. The alternative to disobedience on

your part will probably be the loss of your hand. I cannot answer for it now whether gangrene can be averted. Need I say more?"

And so it came about that Anna was thrown entirely during the next few days upon her own resources; and these, as we know, were soon exhausted. The one hour of excitement was Dr. Farquhar's visit, which was the only occasion during the day when she visited her husband's room, her motive being quite as much to see the way in which he received the news of Honor, as to hear the medical opinion concerning himself. Sickness and disability were abhorrent to her, and the extreme discomfort she had experienced (for it could scarcely be called sympathy, from witnessing the pain he had endured from his accident, had, as it were, worn itself out, and had yielded to a suppressed, passionate indignation, as the impression grew that it was the anxiety which he suffered on Honor's account which aggravated his condition.

It happened on the fifth day of Methuen's confinement to his room, that Anna, wandering in the park from very restlessness of mind, met Adrian Earle. Her first feeling was to avoid him, partly from an instinctive feeling of guilt, as the cause of the misfortune which had settled upon his home, partly from her strong fear of infection; but he besought her so urgently to stand still, even if only at a distance, that she yielded to his prayer. Also, she was eager for news from some other source than the doctor's guarded lips.

"You need not be afraid," he said, understanding her reluctance. "Our poor Honor is quite isolated and hedged in with precautions. No member of the household has seen her except my aunt, and she is equally cut off from all the rest of the family. Anna, if this blow fall, it will change life for every one of us."

"Ah! I remember; you also loved Honor in the old days." Anna's face was white and threatening.

"And as I loved her in the old days, I love her still," he answered, "as a brother loves the sister whose equal he has never met. Anna, suffer me to come nearer—you cannot be angry because I am sorry for Honor?"

"No, no," she cried eagerly; "keep your distance! I should shriek with terror if you touched me. If this horrible disease were to seize me, I should die of self-loathing alone! But—she will not die?"

"God forbid!" he said. "I know nothing certainly. The doctors keep their own counsel—my aunt and the nurses we are not permitted to see. A blight has fallen over Earlescourt: my father has never gone off the premises since Honor was stricken. He sits nearly all day long in the library waiting—waiting for the end. Oliver is beside himself: it almost seemed as if we should have to use physical force to prevent him from attempting to reach her room. I say I know nothing, but—we all fear the worst."

Anna listened intently, with her hands crushed together.

"And none of you—no one—has any idea how this happened?"

"Yes; she has told Farquhar she touched the child of some beggar-woman, with the disease upon it, whom she met on the Trichester road. What punishment could equal the guilt of that woman?"

"Yes," said Anna, in a low tone, "it was a great crime! Does she suffer much?"

He shuddered a little. "Terribly, I believe; but I dare not let my mind dwell upon it. To-morrow or the next day, they say, there must be a change for better or for worse."

Anna turned very pale. "So soon!" And then she added, almost involuntarily—"I do not think Philip knows that."

Adrian looked a little surprised. "I hear," he said coldly, "that he too has been very ill—Farquhar was talking to my father about him. He was commending him highly, as all the world commends your husband, Anna! It seems that he bears pain as no other man bears it, and is grateful and patient under confinement. Are you his nurse?"

"Do not talk of him," she said, "I cannot bear it. Tell me—tell me something more about Honor. Does she know that—that she is so very ill?"

"At intervals, I believe," he said sadly; "but she has been for the most part delirious. I do not like to let my mind rest on the idea—the gracious, gentle creature! Let me come and bring you my report to-morrow!"

"You may come," was the answer, "but I do not promise to be here," and she turned and walked slowly away, without vouchsafing another word or backward glance.

It was the morning before Christmas Day; but there was no seasonable brightness of spirit possible, although the outside world was in harmony with the time. The frozen snow lay in undulating masses as far as the eye could reach, the distant hills were tipped with it, and a hard gray sky brooded over the earth, almost without variation of its leaden line. A path of some extent had been swept and cleared from the grounds of Methuen Place to Anna's favorite point in the park, in order that she might take the daily constitutional exercise on which Dr. Farquhar strictly insisted.

She had been pacing it up and down when she met Adrian Earle, and now that she had dismissed him, and perceived that he was out of sight, she did not go back to the house as she had intended, but retraced her steps once more when she had nearly reached it.

A profound sentiment of dissatisfaction filled her mind. She had not meant to kill Honor. Indeed, her revenge would have been more acceptable had it taken the form of *life*, changed and blighted, for its object. Death would mean canonization of the victim. As long as Philip drew the breath of life he would worship that sweet memory, as devotee adores his tutelar saint: the dead woman's shadow would stand between them as her living presence had done.

It was disillusion—not immortal sorrow—with which she had laid her account.

Presently, through the still heavy air, the muffled sound of church bells reached her ears ringing a merry peal: they were those of Skeffington, and were no doubt practising in view of the next day's high religious festival. A smile, that would have been bitter but for its intense sadness, touched Anna's lips. She remembered that her cousins and their friends would be busy now, adorning the village church with the abundant evergreens and choice out-house blossoms placed by the faithful of all degrees at their service, and animated by the joy and hope which had made life sacred and endurable to so many generations long since passed away, but which had no message for her.

There would be a spring of earthly joy, too, welling up in Dolly's pure heart, and shining through her blue eyes, scarcely less holy than the spiritual—while she?

The passion of her sorrow and disappointment was too much for her. An instinct scarcely known to her before

constrained her. She turned back rapidly toward the house, and made her way to the chapel. That, too, was in high preparation for the next day's festival. Anna thought the greenhouses must have been emptied to furnish the wealth of white flowers which she saw. And then again a closer glance convinced her that Methuen Place could never have provided them. She looked at the treasures of art upon and above the altar; at the massive wax-candles which encumbered it; at one special crucifix wrought in ivory, which was so consummate in execution as to chain her eyes for a moment. And then the irony of some of her father's hard speeches, as she had stood as a child by his side in the Duomo of Florence, passed over the surface of her mind and killed her religious aspiration.

Instead of flinging herself on her knees and pouring out her soul to the pitying Mother of God, she shrank backward with a sudden recoil, and shook herself as if to throw off some unworthy incubus.

At the same moment the young priest, Father Coghlan, entered the chapel, and bowed profoundly on recognizing the lady of the house. He was greatly surprised also, but that sentiment was held in respectful reserve.

"Is all this," asked Anna, making an inclusive movement toward the altar and church, "for the benefit of the household servants and the few stragglers from outside? Will you hold high mass for them, Father?"

"Lady Methuen forgets! To-morrow is to be a white day in our calendar—Father Florentius himself will lead the services of the Church, and Sir Philip Methuen proposes to be present—I have just returned from the honor of an interview."

"True, I had forgotten; our guest is to arrive to-night." And Anna turned and went away, with a more courteous salute than her wont, and without further comment.

As she crossed the stone passage which divided the house from the chapel, she heard the luncheon-bell ring. What a mockery the routine of a large establishment seemed for a solitary girl like herself! She had hoped that Dr. Farquhar would have come in before this, and been induced, as he sometimes was, to stay to luncheon, but he had not arrived.

As she entered the house she saw that a man on horseback had just ridden off from the side entrance, and her

heart beat violently, for she recognized the Earle livery. Was it some special notification of Honor's condition? And if it were, to whom was it addressed, and for what end?

She went rapidly upstairs, threw off her things, and rang for her maid; but before her bell was answered she heard the door of her husband's room open and Duncan's step on the passage outside, as though he were in the act of leaving it.

For a few moments she waited breathless, asking herself what step she should take; then went up to the glass and looked at her pale face and dilating eyes with a sense of self-contempt at her own weakness. The next minute she had crossed the passage and tried the door of Methuen's room. It did not yield to her hand—it was locked—against her, she said to herself, in her growing excitement.

"Philip, will you open? I must speak to you!" she cried, in a voice laden with passionate excitement. And then it occurred to her that he was necessarily alone, as she had heard Duncan go downstairs, and that in that case he must rise and open the door to her, in direct contravention of the doctor's orders. Then again it darted across her mind that he must already have defied these injunctions, in order to lock the door upon himself. Her speculations were soon resolved. A step, not to be mistaken, crossed the floor of the room within, and the next moment the key was turned, and she stood face to face with Philip.

She started back in astonishment—he was fully dressed, as if for going out. "What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "Are you mad? Where are you going?"

He hesitated a moment, then drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a slip of paper, and handed it to her.

It contained these words, in what she recognized as Miss Earle's handwriting: "Honor has asked for you urgently. It is for you to decide whether you will see her once more before she dies. They give us no more hope."

Anna's face grew almost as pale as the paper she held, which shook perceptibly with the violent trembling of the hand that grasped it; the pupils of her eyes darkened and dilated, and she looked with a powerful effort toward Philip, who was watching her with grave attention.

He put out his left hand and touched her shoulder.

"I thank God," he said solemnly, "that you have the grace to be sorry, Anna. Let me pass—there is no time to lose."

Then, as she had done once before, Anna flew to the door and set her back against it.

"You shall not go!" she cried, in a voice hoarse with conflicting passions; "you shall not go and risk your life and mine! Let her die with her last farewells unspoken—before she has poisoned you with her kisses, and revenged herself on me by taking from me what I refuse to give up! Philip—I beseech you—I am horribly afraid—do not go!"

"Perhaps," he said, "your fear and horror are natural; but you may be quite sure I will not divide any danger with you. There is no possible precaution, Anna, that I will not take on my return. But as for rejecting the prayer of a dying creature, I would not do that under any circumstances—at whatever cost."

"Oh, be reasonable!" she urged, and she clasped her hands about his arm and hung upon him to impede his movements. "Think that you yourself have only just risen from a sick-bed, and are specially sensitive to this kind of danger. I suppose what harm is possible to be done to your hand is done already!—that plea will have no power. I tell you, Philip, you will drive me wild if you persist in this madness. Is my despair—my love—to be nothing, weighed in the balance against her loathly embrace!"

"I cannot argue with you," he said, trying to free himself, "and I cannot yield. Were Honor Aylmer a stranger and an outcast, and sent for me to her death-bed, I should obey the summons. Let me go, Anna!"

She released her hold of him, and stepped away from the door. Her eyes shone in her pale face with an unnatural light.

"Go!" she answered, "but do not go deceived. You thought just now that I was sorry for her, but you are mistaken. Had I felt sorry, her wickedness in sending for you would have killed the feeling. I am glad that she will die—I did not mean it, but I am glad that she will die!"

She looked defiantly into his whitening face. He was gazing at her with a sort of stupefaction.

"You have not courage to ask me what I mean," she

went on. "I will tell you. I have done nothing—*nothing* to bring this misfortune upon Earlescourt, and to rob you of the desire of your eyes; but I—I might have averted it. I was with her when she took the beggar's brat into her arms, and I knew what ailed it. Simply, I held my tongue! I meant to spoil the beauty which had blighted my life, and to wean you from your love by making her an object of disgust. I see now she will never be that to you, therefore—let her die! Can you hate me worse than you did before?"

And she opened the door, and went out swiftly.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so! Might I save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul
Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole;
Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new."
—R. BROWNING.

THERE was a suite of rooms at Earlescourt which went by the name of "My Lady's Chambers," and had always been appropriated to her own special service, by the ruling mistress of the grand old mansion. They formed almost a wing apart, and were shut in from the rest of the house by huge folding-doors.

When Miss Earle came to Earlescourt, she had naturally succeeded to this privilege, which she shared with her little adopted daughter, Honor Aylmer, from that day to the present, when the circumstance of the complete isolation of these apartments lent itself so favorably to the precautions which had become necessary.

It was naturally a part of the house with which Philip Methuen was least acquainted. The man who admitted him led the way as far as the wide corridor on which the rooms opened, and then retired, explaining that he was forbidden to proceed farther, and if Sir Philip would have the goodness to wait where he was for a few minutes, Dr. Farquhar would come to him immediately.

Almost before the servant had disappeared, the heavy curtain which hung before the doors on the inner side was rung back, one of their leaves was stealthily opened, and the doctor appeared in the issue, and beckoned to Philip to advance.

Outside in the corridor where he had been standing, the pale radiance of a wintry sunset, enhanced by the dazzling whiteness of the snow-covered earth, had raised the daylight to a higher point than it had reached before that day; but as the doors closed and the curtain dropped behind him, he seemed to enter on the gloom of night. The air also was heavily charged with the penetrating odor of modern disinfectants.

"Sit down a moment," said the doctor; "we are out of hearing of the patient and nurses, and I have a word to say to you. This step is outside my province, but for all that I desire to enter my protest against it. These women here are tender fools, but I look upon you as almost guilty of a crime in abetting their folly. Your duty to your wife should have kept you at home. It is not yet too late to turn back. I have warned Miss Earle that it was my intention to expostulate with you."

"You have discharged your conscience," was Methuen's answer, "and I respect your motives; but my mind is quite made up. Shall we go in?" There was almost a mechanical composure about his manner and speech. The doctor looked at him with a sour, dissatisfied expression, and then raised the single gas-jet which lighted the little ante-room a trifle higher.

"So be it!" he said. "I have done my duty, and wash my hands of the consequences. You have probably come here fasting, to make the danger of infection doubly sure?"

"On the contrary, I ate a fair luncheon an hour or so ago, and have fortified myself by one or two measures in vogue in the hospitals of Paris. I have watched by small-pox patients before to-day, and one of them even died in my arms. I took no hurt."

The doctor uttered a contemptuous snort.

"Don't repeat the experiment, Sir Philip Methuen, on the strength of past immunity! You were then in the heyday of youth, health, and fanaticism, I conclude, and not bound to the poor wretches you succored by the most intimate ties of sympathy, as seems to be the case with this poor lady. But I repeat, I have done. I am on my way home. Jenkyns is here, and spends the night again. You will probably find him more civil."

He got up brusquely, then stopped a moment. "I am forgetting you are my patient. Allow me to examine the position of your hand and to rearrange the sling."

Is this the best that Duncan can do, after all my instruction? But it is a heaven-born gift vouchsafed to few. That is better. Good-by. As soon as Miss Earle hears I am gone, she will come to you."

Almost before Methuen had realized that he was alone, Miss Earle entered from the room beyond. She was dressed with her usual exquisite precision in soft gray woollen garments, and a black lace handkerchief was thrown over her still beautiful fair hair, and knotted under the delicate chin. She looked pale and worn, and her eyes were heavy with sleepless care; but there was the same fine composure in speech and manner, which was one of her most delightful characteristics. It specially commended itself to Methuen's approval. He advanced to meet her, and raised her hand with tender respect to his lips.

"Those who love her," he said, "can never be grateful enough for your devotion."

She looked at him intently, and her eyes softened almost to tears.

"You must not be too kind," she said, "for I do not wish to break down—yet. I am sorry to see you look so very ill. Dr. Farquhar tells me we are doing wrong, and he is right; but I confess I would even do wrong for her dear sake."

She paused a moment, then continued: "Is it necessary to warn you against—against being shocked? Have you ever seen a sick person under this disease before? Honor must have great faith in your constancy to summon you to her bedside——"

Her voice shook a little.

He reassured her on this point, and waited for what more she might choose to say, although the tension of his anxiety was growing hard to bear.

"She has suffered terribly. I shall wonder later how I endured to witness it, but to-day she is quieter and more herself. She reproaches herself now that she has sent for you. Throughout her delirium—when I was able to follow it—it was always you and your troubles which pressed upon her brain. It revived the bitterness of my old feelings for you. She gave you her whole heart, and you broke it——"

He did not answer, and she paused to recover her self-command.

"Come!" she said, when she spoke again. "I will

take you to her, and leave you alone for a quarter of an hour. This way—take care! we keep the rooms **very** dark—do not desire to see her too plainly.”

She led the way into another apartment, which was only lighted by the blaze of the large pine logs on the hearth, and the fading light of the short December day.

On a small, curiously carved antique bed, covered by a purple silk coverlet, the sick girl was lying. The room otherwise had all the dainty appointments of a lady's sitting-room, and beyond the strong medicated odors with which it was permeated—scarcely qualified by the huge bowls of violets placed here and there on the different surfaces—there was nothing to offend the most fastidious senses. The position of the bed was such that the occupant lay in deep shadow.

Philip stood motionless by the door, while Miss Earle went swiftly up to the couch and bent over Honor, speaking in a low whisper. He did not catch a sound in reply. When she came back to him she said: “I think I can trust your self-control. We are all in attendance in the room beyond this, but not within hearing. I trust to your honor not to exceed the time named.” And the next moment he was alone with his lost and dying love.

“My God!” he said to himself, “give me the grace of self-containment.” And then he went nearer, but not close to the bed, standing in the light and heat of the fire.

“Honor,” he said gently, “you have sent for me, and I am here; but I should have come if you had not sent for me—to say farewell, as friends must on the eve of a long parting. My dear, can I speak one word or do one thing that will make that parting easier?”

His eyes were fixed with strained attention on the bed. He saw a slight quiver of her limbs beneath the coverlet, and she made a feeble movement of her head, as if to raise it from the pillow. And it was not in his power to take her in his arms and place her more at ease!

“Come nearer!” she answered, in a voice pitifully changed and broken. “Were you willing to run this risk for me? I tried to be content to die without seeing you, but—could not! Are you close to me, Philip? Ah, God!”—with a sudden wail as if the words were wrung from her lips—“I cannot see him after all!”

The he knelt down beside her and gazed for a few intense moments into the disfigured face, her own so close to his that even her dim and swollen eyes received

the full impression of it. For a moment love conquered every other feeling, and she gazed at him till the pure passion of her soul almost gave back the old beauty to her face. Then a sudden spasm shook her; he saw the tears gather in her eyes, and the quivering of her mouth. She put up her hands and covered her face.

"I had forgotten! But of old I know you could look at what others loathed and not loath it. Can you bear to look upon me, Philip? I have not seen myself—tell me the truth! Am I—am I abhorrent in your sight—except for pity's sake?"

"I should like," he said, in a low whisper, "to take you in my arms and kiss you as I have dared to kiss you in the old days, but I will not do that. Not so much that it would be thought by yourself and others a mad thing to do, but because I would not insult your goodness by passion which it is sin to indulge. Only believe—I never loved you better than to-day!"

He drew down the sheltering hands gently from her face.

"Just tell me," he continued quietly, "something about what you have suffered—what you have felt, and if the thought of separation from all that you love is very hard to bear? Or whether, saint as you are, God's will absorbs your own, and you are willing to let go this warm, familiar, engrossing life for the strange glory of the beatific vision?"

"Ah!" she whispered, "submission is easier when life has been spoiled! I think for myself I am content to die; but for others—Philip, will you always be good to Miss Earle for my sake? No child ever owed a mother half so much!"

He signified assent, and she went on, in a weak, disjointed way:

"Be kind to poor Oliver, and forgive him! I know he has been ungrateful; but it was out of mistaken pity for me. Dear Philip, I want you to believe that—that I have not been very unhappy——"

"I can well believe it," he said, in a stifled voice; "the peace of God dwells with the pure in heart. You go to receive your reward."

"Not that! I have never been tried like you. Duty has always been made very easy to me."

Her face grew troubled: the thoughts which pressed upon her brain she was too weak and burdened to put

into words. She put out her hands toward him with a pathetic gesture.

"Say—you are happier; that is the comfort I want."

"My dear, be comforted," he answered. "The sort of happiness you mean was put out of my reach when I lost the woman I adored; but it would have been a snare had it been granted. I am at last content to have foregone it. Wish for me now the peace that comes from the surrender of will and desire, so that I may be able to do my daily work better in the future than the past, and to consent to live on and labor to the end, which seems so very far off, when—when what I love has been taken away."

"Ah!" she murmured, "I cannot reach so high as that! God knows how happy I would have been to have been happy, and could have loved and served Him—better, I think. But all that is doubly past. Philip," she went on, drawing her breath with difficulty, "I will own the truth to you—I said just now I was content to die; but—I am terribly afraid of dying!"

"And if you are," he answered, in tones touched to the finest note of sympathetic comprehension, "what is that but one more sacrifice to the Divine Will? Our weakness can never reach the limits of God's mercy. Does He who knows our frames and remembers that we are but dust demand from us what is outside or beyond humanity? I believe that there is not a pang that we feel but is accepted by God, as on the same lines of sacrifice as the supreme atonement of His Son. Did the sword that pierced the soul of Mary at the Cross wound less deeply than the nails and the spear?"

She put out her hand with an irresistible impulse and touched his.

He paused a moment, and then took it deliberately into his firm, cool grasp.

Her eyelids were closed, and the tears were slowly welling beneath them.

"To see you—to hear you—breaks my heart! I cannot bear it even as well as I thought. Philip—tell me—that you believe that we shall meet hereafter?"

"I believe it as firmly as that light succeeds darkness and life is the outcome of death. My love! my darling! there are things I would say but dare not, lest I should disturb the peace of your soul. I—I trust you to that infinite love we can neither measure nor exhaust Our

spirits will meet before the mercy-seat of God, this side of my own dismissal."

And then, as his inspired face was bowed over her own, the strong yearning of her tender woman's heart conquered her. She drew away the hand he still held, and put both her arms about his neck.

"How shall I consent to let you go?" she murmured; "I have loved you more than you knew. Kiss me once more, Philip!"

Then she uttered a little cry and released him.

"Ah, I forgot! I ask too much."

Was anything else possible to him but to put his lips to hers with the same ardor as when they were soft and fragrant with the dews of health? and to close the eyes which sought his so piteously by laying his tender kisses upon the burning lids? Even if love had failed, religion would have sufficed.

A pause succeeded, during which she lay back upon her pillows spent and speechless, and he, aware that the allotted time had expired, rose from his knees, and was standing by the bedside in suspense of some word or movement on her part, when there was a tap at the door and Miss Earle entered.

She advanced anxiously toward the bed.

"She is worse?" she asked; "but this was to be expected. I must send you away. You have not, I hope, left your farewells till the last moment."

"No," he answered, "we are prepared to part now; but I do not think she is worse, beyond the pain and fatigue of the interview."

He bent over her and put the border of the silken coverlet to his lips.

"God give my beloved sleep!" he whispered, and then followed Miss Earle out of the room, a sweet-faced nurse gliding into it at one door as they left it by the other.

"I will not keep you long," she said, when they had reached the ante-room, "for you look as if you ought to go home to bed yourself, only—is she—is she so ill as you expected to find her?" She looked at him with a pathetic wistfulness.

He hesitated. "It would be very presumptuous for me to offer an opinion in a case like this, and in contradiction to authority we are all bound to respect, and I am still more reluctant to raise a gleam of hope when you have ordered your soul to submission, but—I do not

think your beloved Honor will die. God will give her back to the ceaseless prayers which have gone up in her behalf."

Miss Earle changed color and trembled a little.

"Oh," she said in a stifled voice, "you try me more than I can bear! and yet you speak like one—like one who knows—as if you had received a revelation. But no cruelty will equal yours if you are deceived."

"I feel that deeply, and yet could not think it right to be silent. Encourage her to believe that she will recover," he continued; "bribe her fainting energies with your hope and expectation, and she will conquer her weakness by the strength of her desire to live—for your sake."

She looked at him with her fine penetrating smile.

"And have you no part or lot in the matter? You speak as if you stood outside these hopes."

"Not so," he answered, almost with solemnity. "The possibility of Miss Aylmer's recovery has lifted a load from my shoulders, that I do not know whether I should have been strong enough to bear. But I may as well tell you that, under any circumstances, I have seen her for the last time. Words are useless: simply, it is better that it should be so. As soon as I am fit to travel, Methuen Place will be shut up and we shall go abroad. The house in South Audley Street will be once more to let."

"I am very sorry," she said, looking at him with a kindness which was almost tender; but he gave her no encouragement to further inquiry, and she was too eager to return to the sick-room to be anxious to detain him.

As she re-entered it the nurse came softly toward her with her finger on her lips.

"Is it a miracle?" she said. "Miss Aylmer is in a sweet sleep, and every symptom—skin, pulse, temperature—is improved!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"Jesu, Maria—I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now.
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my brow,—
'Tis this new feeling, never felt before,
That I am going, that I am no more."

—*Dream of Gerontius.*

THERE was high mass in the Methuen chapel, and a crowded audience on Christmas Day. Father Florentius had arrived at the Place the night before, and, assisted by the domestic chaplain and the old Catholic vicar of Crawford, took the chief part in the grand ceremonial, which was conducted on the highest lines of ritualistic observance. The perfection of the choir and organ practice was such as to excite the unqualified admiration and surprise of the former, and the eulogium that he pronounced at the close of the service bound boys and choir-master to him for life.

Anna, who had assisted at the service, as an imperative point of courtesy on the part of the lady of the house, stood by his side as he spoke, and smiled with a bitterness which could not fail to attract his observation.

As they returned to the house together, he said, with the winning, sympathetic manner which was his distinguishing characteristic:

"This is at once a proud and a sad day for you, Lady Methuen. The chapel is perfect—a witness to Sir Philip's zeal and devotion; but it is a cruel disappointment that he is not able to be present to-day to rejoice in the work which he has done."

Anna turned her large, luminous, pathetic gaze upon him. "My heart is so sore," she said, "that if you would consent to receive my confession I am half disposed to unburden it, or—I think it will burst!"

"My daughter," he answered, "it is my duty as well as my pleasure to be at your service, now, or at any other time you choose to appoint."

"Then it shall be some other time," she returned, with a dreary smile; "and when you have unrobed will you come into my room and talk to me a little?—not as Father Florentius, but as the man who won my gratitude forever, because he was kinder to me than any one else

on the day that I was married and stood in such sore need of kindness."

A little later Anna received him in her morning-room, which was heated to almost a tropical temperature, and was like a bower of enchantment, from the profusion of exotic ferns and blossoming plants that it contained. She herself, dressed in a straight gown of ruby velvet, and leaning over the mantel from an uncontrollable feeling of restlessness, appeared to the distinguished ecclesiastic, as he entered, to be without controversy one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

At her request he took a seat which stood opposite to her, and, judging of her mood from her face, waited in silence for her to open the conversation. No courteous platitudes, however graceful or discreet, would be acceptable to one who looked as she looked.

"Philip still refuses to see you?" she asked presently.

"He refuses; but before I leave to-night I shall insist upon seeing him, not in my character of friend, whose safety he is bound to protect, but of priest, whose duty it is to put merely personal precautions on one side."

"In that case, then, I shall be obliged to bid you farewell before you see him, as the quarantine he has established is so strict that he will not let me see or speak to any one who has come into contact with himself. I ask you, not as priest, but as gentleman, is a man justified who exposes himself to a risk so horrible as this, and is also well aware that the separation and anxiety will drive me mad?"

Father Florentius made a slight deprecating movement of head and hand.

"Pardon me, dear Lady Methuen, but, although, if you sought spiritual guidance and relief, it would be my duty to hear whatever you thought proper to reveal, yet as a personal friend of your husband, and his guest, I do not feel at liberty to receive the honor of your confidence."

"Ah!" she answered, "it is always the same; I stand alone and have no friends. Priests are always cowards!"

He smiled without the slightest trace of irritation.

"I assure you it needed more courage to refuse than accept what it was a personal distinction to have offered, but the wife of Philip Methuen can never stand in need of friends, nor of guidance, nor advice. The resolution which keeps you apart is only one more proof of his

affectionate solicitude, and the circumstances which have rendered it necessary——” He paused a moment, for she made a movement of contemptuous impatience.

“Ay!” she broke in, “how do you propose to defend them?”

“They do not appear to me to need defence,” he answered quietly. “They were such as no man’s charity could have resisted.”

“Enough! it is all a foregone conclusion! I cannot bring myself to the humiliation of the confessional. Excuse me a moment. I think I hear Dr. Farquhar’s foot on the stairs, and I must speak to him before he leaves the house. He has been with Philip for more than an hour, and we both want to hear what he says.”

She crossed the room and threw open the door, calling to the doctor by name, and asking him to come in and speak to her; but he professed to be in a hurry, and would have passed on without stopping, if she had not stepped forward and intercepted his passage.

“What is the meaning of your treating me in this way?” she demanded. “Why have you been so long upstairs, and now seek to avoid me?”

“For no other reason in the world, Lady Methuen, than that I am anxious to get home to my Christmas dinner,” returned Dr. Farquhar good-naturedly. “And I have been a longer time than usual with Sir Philip, because the dressing of his hand was a troublesome business after—what shall we say?—after the unusual exertions of yesterday.”

“Has he done himself much harm?”

“Not so much as he ought; I mean such indiscretions deserve punishment. The wounds are now healing fairly well, by the second intention. You will be glad to know the extreme severity of the pain and all danger are over.”

“All?” she repeated.

“All from this source. Once more, good morning, Lady Methuen; but I am forgetting to give you the good news from Earlescourt. Our patient has taken a good turn—we are full of hope.”

Anna turned deadly pale; was it joy or grief which gripped her heart?

“I am very glad!” she said mechanically, and allowed the doctor to pass on his way.

Father Florentius left by the evening mail; but he had

a long interview with his host before his departure, concerning which Anna of course knew nothing, under the stringent regulations which Philip had instituted.

So intolerable were the revolt and restlessness of her mind, that, unable either to sit still or to find occupation, she left the warm sitting-room and paced up and down the long gallery with a fur garment thrown over her shoulders.

The moon was at its full, and flooded the floor with its white light, producing weird effects of light and shade, as its rays fell on panel and picture. The air was full of the sound of church-bells for evening service, and the outside world, radiant in its garniture of snow, showed with what seemed to her preternatural distinctness. She could catch the steely gleam of the sea in the far distance, and even thought she could detect the boom of the incoming tide.

It is a commonplace to say on how many guilty and sorrowful creatures the cold moonlight shone that Christmas evening, or even what a succession of aching and despairing hearts had throbbed and suffered within the walls of the gray old mansion of which this girl was mistress—only there is an inexhaustible pathos in the thought of the measureless extent and perennial flow of human frustration and misery.

"I am so beaten back and baffled," she said to herself; "the secrets of their meeting yesterday I shall never know. Was she loathsome in his sight?—or did he consent to touch her, and that is why he holds himself infected? O God!" she cried aloud in involuntary appeal, "I cannot bear what it is given to me to bear! I seem to hear his voice, to see the look with which he would greet this woman, plague-stricken as she is. That is not enough! now, if never before, I wish that she were dead!"

And then she asked herself what madness tempted her to tell him that she was guilty of this crime, which, otherwise, could never have been known or suspected, and so place a barrier between them that even his greatness of mind could never overleap.

She might have tasted her revenge in silence, drawing him to her, as had seemed possible of late, by the irresistible force of her own flawless loveliness, as opposed to the scathed and marred condition of her victim.

And then another thought dropped into her mind,

but her mind refused to hold it. If the pit she had dugged for her enemy should be set for her own destruction! if this man, the object of her selfish but absorbing passion, was to lose—not his life, that was inconceivable—but the bloom and glory of his manhood, because he had chosen to drink out of the poison-cup she had mixed for Honor Aylmer!

She put the horrible apprehension from her with something of the same sense of physical repulsion with which saints of old turned their back upon the Satan who tempted them.

“Shall I go to him,” she asked herself, stopping before his door, “and drop upon my knees before him, and tell him that, cast out of his favor, I cannot live? May not the hope of Honor’s recovery have softened his heart?”

But this idea was abandoned. She durst not defy his authority—planted on such sufficient grounds; nor could she bow her pride so low as to crawl to his feet for pardon on the very morrow of her defiance.

No; what was left to her was to wait and consume her heart.

When Philip Methuen returned from his visit to Earlescourt the day before, he had set himself, with the mental habit of his character, seriously to consider and provide against the consequences of the step he had taken.

While holding himself justified in risking his own health and life in the service of his fellow-creatures, he was solicitous almost to excess for the safety and welfare of others. The danger he had chosen to incur should at least not be suffered to extend farther, if rigid precaution could hinder it.

No member of the household, except the faithful Duncan, who stoutly refused to be dismissed, should come into contact with him until the expiration of the time when his technical knowledge taught him that anxiety might be dismissed or confirmed. Any sacrifice which this resolution entailed was not of much account to a man who had made self-abnegation the principle of his life; and the view he had taken of his duty was stoutly supported by Dr. Farquhar.

Methuen had suffered this purpose to be overruled by Father Florentius, because he did not consider himself at liberty either to resist his authority or to oppose what was held by the latter in the light of an act of religion,

besides the profound personal satisfaction he derived from the exercise of the priestly functions of his friend.

After this followed a painful interval.

The solitude to which he had condemned himself left him ample time to consider and reconsider the atrocious confession which his wife had made to him in their last interview. It was of a character to alter all their relations, and to render the programme of devotion and self-sacrifice which he had marked out for himself impossible. But, accepting such as the result, what then was the future to be? What attitude was a man to assume toward the woman who boldly avowed sentiments of diabolical malice, and had carried them out to their legitimate issue, and whose dormant conscience seemed insusceptible of the saving pangs of remorse and penitence? Linked in irrefragable bonds with what his soul abhorred—so that all former alienation was by contrast union—what did religion and duty demand?

His feelings in respect to Honor herself were those of curious disengagement. She would not die but live—of that he felt assured—but she was henceforth dead to him; and if happiness in the common meaning of the word were out of her reach, the higher grace of blessedness was hers. Sweet saint! unwedded wife!—from whom his allegiance had never swerved—here he set the final seal upon their earthly fellowship.

Another point which occupied Philip's attention was the final distribution of his property. He had long since liberally provided for Anna in the way of marriage settlements, but he had made no will in view of the contingencies of the future. He now set himself to do this. He gave his wife a life-interest in Methuen Place and in the town house in South Audley Street, with a suitable addition to her income, the administration of her affairs being placed in the hands of trustees, and zealously guarded against waste or abuse, though she was left unshackled by any personal restriction. There were benefactions of pictures and antique plate, which were among the most precious possessions of the Methuen family, to the Earl of Sainsbury—"my beloved friend and master," as also to the seminary of St. Sulpice; and legacies to servants and the many poor men whom he counted among his friends, all carefully regulated according to their respective claims and wants. The bulk of his fortune, both present and prospective, was devised

to the Church of his fathers and of his own deliberate devotion, for the building and endowment of a Catholic church, schools, and hospital, in that quarter of East-end London where the spiritual and temporal need was greatest; the decision and regulation of the fund being left, under adequate safeguards, to the wisdom and wide experience of Father Florentius.

It was a work of some labor and difficulty to draw up the draft of so complex a testament, and when he had concluded he sat for some time longer before his writing-table, with his elbow resting upon it and his hand shading his eyes.

Duncan, who had been of necessity his amanuensis, and who had already received orders to take the papers to Methuen's solicitors early next morning, with injunctions for immediate despatch, watched him with silent anxiety.

Presently Philip looked up.

"My uncle's room, Duncan—has it been kept in order, aired and so forth, since Mrs. Gibson left?"

"I believe so, Sir Philip. I know she gave strict orders on the point," and the man's hard voice took, in spite of him, a changed inflection.

"I should like to have it prepared for my occupation, so that I can sleep in it to-morrow night. In case of sickness, it is further removed from the rest of the household, and—I prefer the room to any other."

"Good God! Sir Philip, you don't mean——" and the strong, gaunt old Scotchman stood up, positively blanched and trembling.

"I mean nothing but that I want a change of apartments. This room is too near Lady Methuen's, and I am weary of my confinement in it: it is more than a week since I crossed its threshold. You must look upon it, Duncan, as the caprice of an invalid." And then he added, "My hand is much more painful to-night."

Duncan held his tongue, knowing his young master's idiosyncrasies almost as well as he had known those of the old baronet before him; but his heart grew cold within.

Philip had risen from his seat and begun to pace the room. After a few minutes' interval, he stopped at the unshuttered window, put back the blind, and looked out into the night.

"The moon is rising," he said, "and it is not late. Sup-

pose, Duncan, you ride in with the papers to-night? The office will be closed, but you can leave them at Mr. Chapman's private house."

"You will let me help you to bed first, Sir Philip, and bring Dr. Farquhar back with me?"

"I am not disposed for bed, and will wait up at least until you return. As for Farquhar"—he saw the man's countenance fall, and added kindly—"yes; call upon him if you like, and ask him to come early in the morning. Also, give instructions about the room to-night, but quietly—to one maid only."

Dr. Farquhar was at Methuen Place by daylight on the following morning. He could learn no particulars from Duncan, as the man had found his master's door locked on his return from Trichester, and had been told when he applied for admission that his services were not required.

When the doctor entered the room, Methuen rose from the chair in which he was sitting, to receive him. He had evidently not been in bed all night; both fire and lamp were burning brightly.

Farquhar looked into his face for a moment, held his hand a little longer, and shook his head; going on to apply the invariable medical tests with as few words as possible. When he had done and Philip had sat down again, he said, chafing his hands before the fire and looking away from him as he spoke:

"I anticipated this when I saw you yesterday morning, though I naturally held my tongue. The progress of the fever is, however, much more rapid than I expected—I speak to a man who knows; you will be reasonable?"

"I hope so—so long as reason is left."

Farquhar glanced toward him sharply.

"You are very bad? It will be well to call in Jenkyns at once."

"I am very bad," was the deliberate answer, "and am deeply anxious to make the best of my time. Call in on Chapman and Hurst on your way home and urge the necessity of despatch with the business they have in hand. You can tell them how pressing it is. Perhaps one of them, or at least a confidential clerk, could come over this afternoon. For the rest, summon the whole college of physicians, if it will be any satisfaction to you or others; but personally I desire no other attendance than your own."

He put his hand to his head.

"Can you give me something to keep my brain cool—a little longer—and to relieve the faintness which I have found it almost impossible to resist through the night?"

"I will do my best. You have probably been defying Nature, and she takes her revenges." He glanced toward the little oratory which led out from Philip's dressing-room, and the door of which stood open: "I must order you to bed."

"Not till my uncle's room is prepared for me, when I will no longer resist your authority. I will sit up here till I have seen my lawyer—the sooner the better."

"Is there anything else I can do? Shall I send Coghlan to you?"

"On no account. He is young and useful, with all his life before him—he shall run no risk. But send, if you will, a message to Father Price: I love that old man, and he will be willing to come for my uncle's sake. Also—later on if needs be—telegraph to Father Florentius. I have written as well as I was able to him and the Abbé de Salève last night; but it is not safe for the letters to reach their hands from mine. I thought you would be good enough to disinfect and forward then?"

Farquhar nodded, and picked up the letters from the writing-table.

"Lord Sainsbury?" he asked.

"I have decided to let that go. Did he know of my illness he would come to me, and that must be prevented at all costs. You will keep it as close as possible? I need not say *she* must not know it." He paused, then added, "Wait a moment! I have something else to say—my wife——"

Involuntarily the softened look passed out of the doctor's face. Was she, the doting, beautiful girl, this man's last consideration?

"Yes," he repeated stiffly—"your wife, Sir Philip?"

"I—I must leave it to your discretion to tell her the truth; only she must not, as a matter of course, be allowed to see me."

"You mean you have decided to let that go also? Perhaps she will defy our precautions?"

"That," said Philip sternly, "it will be your duty and the duty of my nurses to prevent. Her safety must be absolutely secured—under any difficulties. It would be better if you could persuade her to leave the house, and

go to the Vicarage. But, forgive me; I think there will be no difficulty."

"And you have no message for her?"

"I have no message for her beyond the earnest entreaty that she will regard my wishes on this point."

Dr. Farquhar proved his sympathy for Lady Methuen by an act of undeniable cowardice. When he left Philip's room he made his way out of the house down the back staircase, and succeeded in reaching his carriage without his early visit becoming known to her. He said to himself he would see her on the occasion of his next, which was timed for a few hours later.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man;
And through such waning span
Of life and thought as still has to be trod,
Prepare to meet thy God.
And while the storm of that bewilderment
Is for a season spent,
And, ere afresh the ruin on me fall,
Use well the interval."

—*Dream of Gerontius.*

THE march of events during the next few days was so rapid that it seemed to those concerned more like some delirious dream than the ordinary sequence of cause and effect.

Methuen preserved his faculties for the transaction of affairs until the affairs he was so anxious to conclude were accomplished, taking careful precaution, by the lucidity and composure of his speech and behavior, to remove any possible doubt on the part of the attached old lawyer who attended him that he was mentally qualified for the task he fulfilled. But the reaction after such a protracted strain was necessarily severe. In the evening of the same day he removed into the room which had been occupied by his late uncle, and was familiarized to him by many a long and affectionate vigil, and the look of poignant and tender recollection on entering it indicated almost the last conscious exercise of his mind.

Later still, Dr. Farquhar and Sir Wilfred Jenkyns met by his bedside. Almost from the first, every symptom pointed to a fatal result, although the secret of his extremity was sedulously kept.

The fever assumed the severest form of typhoid, and delirium and stupor alternated, the repulsive but salutary features of the primary disease remaining suppressed, in spite of all the resources of medical science.

So rapid was the cruel havoc of the disorder, that, on the evening of the fifth day, almost all hope of recovery was abandoned by the several physicians who had been summoned by Anna's exigence to wait helpless on his death-bed.

The old Catholic priest, who had loved this young man with the fine ardor of spiritual kinship, was kneeling by his side, as he had knelt not so much more than a year ago by the side of Sir Giles Methuen: but the latter had been a feeble life which had long fluctuated in the socket; this was the violent rending of the chord of a vigorous and beneficent existence.

An altar, on which the sacred elements were set, had been prepared and placed several hours before, in devout hopes of some change in the condition of the sick man that would render the conscious administration of the last rites possible.

There was another man also who kept unsleeping watch by Methuen's pillow—the distinguished ecclesiastic we have known as Father Florentius, who had been first introduced to him by Lord Sainsbury two days before his marriage, and had been his confessor ever since.

He had put aside every engagement of work or pleasure on the receipt of Farquhar's telegram, and had arrived at the place with a despatch that astonished the latter. He had listened with courteous attention to the representations of risk and danger which the doctor thought it his duty to make, but had practically put them all on one side.

"I have passed unscathed so often through plague and pestilence," he said smiling, "that I believe myself invulnerable; but were it otherwise, to succor this man's last moments I would be willing to go down with him into the valley of death."

"Ah!" returned the other, "you probably know him better than I. The late baronet, his uncle, doted upon him, I remember; but with me he has always seemed on guard—one I never got close to."

As soon as Anna had known of the arrival of Florentius, she had sent him a message beseeching him to see her, if only for a few minutes, before he went upstairs

to the sick-room—a request which was immediately complied with.

He was secretly startled by the change which little more than forty-eight hours had made in the beautiful, defiant woman who had chilled his sympathies at their last interview. This pale, stricken girl, in her clinging black garments, and with the look of a wounded animal in her wild, dilating eyes, struck at once the chord of reverent pity which was so finely strung in this man's nature.

"Father," she said, going up to him and taking his hand in both hers with a gesture of humble but passionate appeal, "they will not let me see him! Think what that means! I am trying to be quiet and reasonable, that you may see that I am to be trusted. I will not speak to him—I will promise not even to touch him; but—if you do not let me see him, I shall go mad!"

"My child," he said, "if words of mine can avail, you shall see your husband."

Then she sank upon her knees and covered his hands with her kisses, refusing to suffer him to raise her from her posture of humiliation.

"Hear me," she murmured, "while I have courage to speak! It is I who have killed him. I will tell you all."

And then she sobbed out her confession: the love which she had had for him, which had been worth nothing in his sight; the forced marriage; the cruel experiences of their union; her sudden discovery of his love for another woman; and her ignoble revenge, which had recoiled upon her own head.

"Ah!" she said, as at length, spent and exhausted, she rose from her knees, "it is not your absolution that I want, but his. Bring me his love and forgiveness, father, or—I will refuse to live. Not that I believe that he is in danger."

And it was for this end, among others, that Florentius sat and watched and waited, during the long course of those terrible days.

Up to this time he had failed in obtaining leave for her admission to the sick-room; for so absolute had been Methuen's orders on this point, and indeed so formidable was held to be the risk of admitting her, added to the bootless pain that the sight of his condition would have caused, that her frantic prayers and denunciations had been of necessity—not disregarded, for every man's heart ached for her—but firmly put aside.

During these days Anna neither ate nor drank, except perhaps when Dr. Farquhar forced a glass of milk or morsel of bread upon her, and scarcely slept; and perhaps in few things did her want of dignity and self-control appear more strongly than in the vehement reproaches she poured forth upon the insufficiency of her husband's medical attendants to save him, so soon as her mind admitted the horrible idea that he might die. Hours of the day she spent in wandering to and fro in the gallery at the far end of which his room was situated, and all through the watches of two long nights she had sat in a chair outside his door, with ear strained to catch the indistinct muttering of his delirium, until Dr. Farquhar had compelled her to abandon her position.

There was no faculty of self-sustainment in her nature. No devotee or cloistered nun ever spent moments of more intense and agonized supplication than did Anna Methuen at the foot of the altar in the little chapel, offering to the God she ignorantly worshipped such bribes of future service and award as might have made the angels weep for pity.

She was of the temper that would have made a pilgrimage on her knees to any shrine whence healing was to be drawn, or have stripped her beauty of every jewel she possessed, to propitiate the unseen powers; but the ravings of her passionate despair, and the submissive prayers of the devoted friends who watched him, were alike in vain. There was no voice, nor any that answered.

And then, as the awful crisis grew, and Farquhar's set face told her what he could not bring his lips to speak, the hard rock of her heart was so far smitten that some drops of compunction filtered through. She had loved him—yes; but she had spoiled his life. She had extorted a sacrifice so great that death itself would have been more tolerable, and exasperated the original wrong until the hourly offence and persistent outrage almost exceeded it.

He had paid back her selfishness and spite with an all but invincible magnanimity, which again in turn served no purpose but to stimulate the restless ingenuity of her efforts to overcome his forbearance.

Her unconscious feeling had been that there was a lifetime before her for reparation of the sins and cruelties of the past, whenever it suited her temper to repair them,

and that she could always count on his generosity to receive her submission—little knowing that Fate stood in ambush to set this seal upon her future, and turn all that was left of life into one vain cry of despair and remorse.

It was in this mood of mind that the miserable girl was lying, face downward, on a couch in her dressing-room, still fighting desperately that fiercest and most exhausting of all warfares—the struggle of human impotence against the Divine Will—when the door was softly opened, and Dr. Farquhar came in. He had knocked at the door, but she had not heard him. It was late in the afternoon of the sixth day of Methuen's declared illness, and the early darkness had almost closed around her.

At the sound of the opening door, Anna started to her feet, and her panic-stricken face asked the question she could not put into words.

"No, my dear," the doctor said, with a kindness so intimate and tender that it was like that of a good brother toward a sister, "I am not come to tell you the worst news of all. Let me light a candle: we can scarcely see each other."

As he did so she observed that his hand shook, and she herself began to tremble violently. Then she said in the sharp accent of intolerable pain:

"You mean—he is dying—but not yet dead? Doctor, if there be a God in heaven to swear by, I swear I will see him once again—alive!"

He caught the folds of her gown to detain her, for she had turned suddenly toward the door.

"Not yet," he answered soothingly—"we are not wanted yet. He has recovered consciousness, and the priests are eager to secure their chance—not more eager than himself, I grant."

He stopped, for the scene he had just quitted had been enough to shake the most rigid self-control; then went on again:

"I have engaged Father Florentius to summon us when—when all that is over—and we must wait a few minutes patiently. He is to be depended upon, and—of necessity—the *viaticum* must be a brief one."

Mrs. Sylvestre herself would have approved the accent in which he muttered these last words.

Anna waited, erect, panting, listening, like a greyhound in the leash. She was not a woman to be coaxed

or petted, rather worshipped or besought; but to Farquhar's eyes the eagerness of her face was exquisitely pathetic. He could not help making some attempt to relieve the terrible tension of her feelings.

"It is something," he said, "at such times as these to know that we have loved with all our heart and soul, and left no jot or tittle of our duty unfulfilled."

He was going on with what soothing commonplaces occurred to his mind, when she broke from him with a sudden little cry:

"For mercy's sake don't try to comfort me!" she said; "it is like burning my flesh with red-hot irons!" And then she began to walk up and down the room, wringing her hands in a frenzy of despair that was terrible to witness.

"There is no God!" she cried; "the world is devil-governed, or no creature would be made to bear such misery as mine! Go back to him—it is a crime, a disgrace, to let him die! These priests are stealing our last chance!"

Then, softening into appeal, and stopping before him with clasped hands, "Oh! if you would let me see him he should not die; I would hold him so tight that his soul could not escape. Philip!"

As if in answer to the appeal, footsteps approached the door. Anna flung it open and confronted Father Florentius.

"At last!" she cried. "You have come to fetch me. Let us go!" And then she looked into his face, no longer sweet and benign, but white and stern with restrained anguish, and all the passionate, intense life faded out of her own.

"Do not speak!" she said, and there was something awful in the strained tension of her woe—"do not speak! I will not hear what you have come to say. Let us go—I will see with my own eyes. He *is not* dead!"

She advanced a step toward the door, and then Nature failed. She threw up her arms with a convulsive gesture, staggered, and would have fallen to the ground, if the priest had not sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

"It is a merciful oblivion," he said, as he lifted the girl and placed her on the couch. "Do not," he added, addressing Dr. Farquhar, "be in too great a hurry to bring her back to a knowledge of her misery."

"All is over?" asked the doctor huskily, "and he did not mention her?"

"All is over!" answered the priest, crossing himself, "and he did not mention her." He stopped, and then added with an effort: "It was evident there was something on his mind he desired with intense anxiety to express, but—it was in vain; he could not make himself understood, and he endured God's will implicitly—to the end."

His face worked for a moment with uncontrollable feeling.

"A light has gone out to-day," he said solemnly, after he had recovered his firmness, "which was set on a hill, and showed farther than most men knew: also it has warmed many hearts."

He turned toward the couch again, and looked at Anna.

"Poor soul! It will be hard to comfort that bruised heart!"

Dr. Farquhar projected his under-lip and remained silent, busying himself in applying restoratives to the senseless girl. His sympathies went out very strongly toward Lady Methuen.

"I leave her in safe hands," continued Florentius, "and I return to town almost immediately. I have an engagement to-morrow, early, which must be met; but I come back for the funeral. You will let me know in time?"

Farquhar nodded assent, his own voice not being perfectly under control, and the two men shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Intervals in their succession
Are measured by the living thought alone,
And grow or wane with its intensity."

—J. NEWMAN.

THREE days afterward, that which remained of Philip Methuen—the last scion of a now extinct race—was laid beside his ancestors in the vault beneath the chancel of the chapel.

The requiem mass was as solemn and impressive as the skill, resources, and devotion of Father Florentius could make it; and the church was filled to overflowing, not

only with personal friends of the dead man, but with a mixed crowd of mourners from the neighboring towns and villages, whose unfeigned grief and discouragement were convincing proofs of the extent and value of his silent work among them.

When they had dispersed, Sir Walter Earle, and a few other men who were more immediately connected with the Methuen family, stood for a few moments looking down into the vault, which was filled to the level of the chancel stones by flowers of exquisite beauty, woven into the wreaths and crosses which are fast becoming a point of mere conventional routine, mixed with humble posies of laurustinus and rue, or scanty bunches of snow-drops and Christmas roses—the heart-tribute of some of the sorrowing poor. Immediately on the coffin-lid itself had been laid a cross of white violets of magnificent proportions, so admirably framed, and the blossoms so firmly and closely welded together that it had almost the consistency of stone.

It had only been received late that morning, and was sent by the Abbé de Salève, from the Seminary of St. Sulpice, "To his dearly beloved son in Christ—Philip Methuen."

"It seems to me only the other day," said the baronet, "that some of us here were first introduced to Philip Methuen by his uncle. I remember, as I daresay you all do, the old man's covert pride and satisfaction in his new heir, and I thought myself that a finer young fellow, one better equipped, both in body and mind, for the battle of life, I had never seen."

There was a low murmur of assent; but at the same moment Father Florentius approached the group, to apologize, with that winning courtesy which always conquered the good-will of strangers, for the lack of hospitality in not asking them to return to the house, but Lady Methuen's condition was such that it was not desirable for any guest to cross the threshold.

When they had left the chapel, being accompanied by him to the door, Florentius returned once more to the interior, and stood for a few minutes looking down into the open vault. Perhaps the men whose vocation cuts them off from the most intimate relations of life which bind others to the future of the race are most susceptible to the strong claims of friendship, slaking a natural thirst at this well of consolation. Any way, as this man

looked into Philip Methuen's grave, he acknowledged to himself that when he turned away from it and faced the world again, it would be with a deeper sense of pain and loss than had ever come to him before—a secret anguish scarcely to be appeased, although it might be transmuted into incessant prayers and masses for the dead.

The sudden and unexpected sound of a footfall on the steps entering the chapel, and approaching in the direction where he stood, caused him to start from his abstraction and face round upon his intruder.

Father Florentius possessed the faculty of a royal memory—he never forgot a face he had once seen nor a name that he had heard—and he recognized immediately in the tall, stiff, black-robed figure before him the kinswoman who had stood at the altar by Anna Trevelyan's side upon her wedding-day. In spite of his instinctive displeasure at what appeared to him an unauthorized intrusion, some recognition was necessary. He bowed stiffly.

"I believe I have the honor of speaking to Mrs. Sylvestre?" he said.

Mrs. Sylvestre, standing rigidly erect, and with her back toward the emblazoned altar, on which the candles still burned in the lustrous gloom, suffered her eyes to traverse his dignified figure from head to foot with a certain grim, investigating discourtesy, and then she glanced down into the open vault. He observed that, as she did so, her face softened a little.

"Your memory serves you well," was her answer; "I am Mrs. Sylvestre, and I have done violence both to my feelings and my principles in seeking you in—in this place. But I have been turned back by lackeys from the door of my niece's house, of which I am given to understand that you are the provisional master. I come, therefore, to ask you personally whether you presume to deny me admission to Lady Methuen?"

"On the contrary," he said, "if you are come, as no doubt you are, to try and console the broken-hearted, and break down the barrier of her despair, I wish you God-speed, and will take you to her myself. Only—such is her state of mind that it would tax the tenderness of a mother, however tender."

"I will do my best, and accept the doubt you imply without resenting it. For I own my heart has never

been softened toward Anna Trevelyan till now; but the one saving spot in her nature was that she loved a man better than herself, and this man has lost his life in a way that might well try the faith and patience of the best among us."

Father Florentius remained silent.

"You will not commit yourself to an opinion," she said. "Philip Methuen's death is a deplorable event, and the onus of it lies heavily on the head of those who invited and encouraged him to put himself in the way of danger. If there is one woman more miserable to-day than the poor, desperate, widowed girl he has left behind him, it must surely be Honor Aylmer! She might be forgiven, if she prayed God that she might die."

They were slowly walking together toward the house, Florentius listening with an air of respectful attention to the intense, incisive speech of his companion, but still preserving silence. Presently she stood still, and looked him full in the face.

"You profess," she said, "to have been this man's friend—under ties of special fellow-feeling. Have you no sense of resentment against the selfishness and folly which have brought him to an untimely grave?"

"Untimely!" he repeated. "So we speak, but do you think that the events of life take God at the surprise, or that the breath which he breathes into our souls is ever surrendered otherwise than at his command? This young man's course was fulfilled: the work accomplished which had been given him to do. When the soldier is called off the field it is because the battle is done."

She glanced at him curiously; his manner was at once so quiet and convinced. "Short service means short pay," was her answer; "or is the heavenly award the same for striplings as for veterans?"

He smiled. "That is a natural mistake we are all apt to fall into—to suppose that time is measured on the same lines in the immaterial world as with us. Its standard of chronology is according to the energy of thought—the concentration of life—the resolution of purpose and of will. In this sense Philip Methuen was older than many old men."

"Have you offered these consolations to his widow?"

"Alas! poor child, I should speak to her in an unknown tongue. It will be for your woman's wit to devise some word or thought of alleviation."

When they had reached the door of Anna's room, Florentius said, "Knock, and enter without waiting for permission, or she may refuse to see you."

Mrs. Sylvestre did as she was told, and in another moment she was standing within the darkened room, straining her eyes to distinguish the figure of her niece. It was no wonder that she did not see her at first, for the windows were darkened, shutting out the mild shining of the winter sun, and the girl in her clinging black garments was lying on her couch, with all the glory of her neglected hair flowing loose about her shoulders. A striking proof of the abandonment of her grief lay in the fact that she was insensible to the circumstances of personal discomfort and relief. She had not taken off her clothes from the hour when the news of her husband's death struck her to the earth, nor had she suffered a servant to enter her room to renew her fire or bring her food.

The temperature struck cold even on Mrs. Sylvestre's well-trained perceptions, and the aspect of Anna, wan, dishevelled, with the gleam of despair, almost of frenzy, in her distended eyes, as she sprang to her feet to resent the unauthorized intrusion, produced an effect on her mind such as she would scarcely have believed it possible for her to experience.

"You!" cried Anna, and her voice was harsh and unnatural, "You! Are you come to mock and insult me—to tell me that I am not more miserable than I deserve?"

"My poor girl! even I am not so hard as that"—her voice shook with the unaccustomed strain of pity and sympathy: "if you will let me, I will love you from this day forward! As for comfort—God knows, I have none to offer you!"

Perhaps no words that she could have spoken would have grated less on the sore exasperated mind of her hearer, to whom consolation seemed only an outrage and offence. The look of tenderness in her aunt's face transformed it for a moment into an expression that recalled the beloved, never-to-be-forgotten father of her childhood; also she was ready to sink under the protracted tension of her misery, and of abstinence from food and rest.

There was a moment of instinctive doubt and holding back, and then she had tottered forward with a piteous little wail, to be caught for the first time in Mrs. Sylvestre's arms and pressed against her breast.

It is difficult to gauge the depths of human misery; but perhaps even the grief of Anna Methuen, with all its aggravations, was not greater than that which bowed to the dust the soul of Isabelle Earle, as she watched the gradual quickening of life and hope and tender gratitude toward God and her friends in her dearly beloved Honor.

Every step which she took toward recovery, and every little indication of renewed interest in the affairs of the outside world—her sweet thankfulness, her winning cheerfulness—had each and all the power of inflicting a separate pang.

How would it ever be possible to communicate that terrible secret, which seemed to enclose in it the very elements of destruction? Would Honor, who was only just now retracing her feeble steps from death's dark valley, hear it and live? At times Miss Earle felt an almost despairing hope that the news might reach her in some indirect way—as though a bird of the air should carry the matter; and again, the fear seized her lest any chance word or look should reveal that to which nothing but her tenderness would be equal. One circumstance made concealment easier, though it seemed to her full of poignant pathos—Honor never mentioned Philip Methuen. It was as though she had accepted that solemn interview as the seal of future separation; but that he was often in her thoughts, and even caused the expressive changes of her sweet face—but little marred by the disease through which she had been so skilfully nursed—was evident to Miss Earle's ceaseless and tender observation. And in this way two months elapsed, and still—so close was the watch kept, and so great the loyalty of all around—Miss Earle had succeeded in keeping back from Honor Aylmer the knowledge of Philip Methuen's death, and each day and hour as it passed made the task more difficult and the result more formidable.

Methuen Place was shut up, and Mrs. Sylvestre had gone abroad with Anna. Honor was permitted to know the former fact, and had naturally drawn from it her own sorrowful but tenderly resigned conclusions, setting her face with a firmness she had never attained before to the idea of that complete renunciation of all intercourse, which he had always held as a duty.

But in spite of all precautions, the blow was finally dealt at unawares, and not by Miss Earle's careful hands.

Honor's convalescence was now so far confirmed that she had resumed most of her usual habits. The spring was late and ungenial: when the weather improved she, with Miss Earle and Adrian, was going away for a lengthened tour; but at present, Dr. Farquhar said, invalids were better off in their own homes with all their comforts around them.

On the occasion of which we speak she was sitting, as she used to sit of old, in Oliver's room, sketching at a table with her back toward him, and each was chatting to the other with more of the old familiar kindness than had marked their intercourse for some time before her illness.

Oliver was talking with great animation of a piece of music he had composed for the piano—a funeral march—which had been received with great acceptance by his friends, so as to suggest to him the idea of publication. "But I own my weakness, Honor," he said, with a forced laugh; "I am afraid of the critics! If they mauled me, I should feel it terribly. Had poor Methuen" (death had destroyed animosity)—and then he stopped with a terrible abruptness, and a look of fear and self-reproach in his face, which was alone a revelation.

"Poor Methuen!" We all know the tone in which the living vaunt their superiority over the dead.

Honor had risen and turned upon him, and the sight of her livid and stricken face brought the miserable Oliver, with a painful effort, crawling to her feet. His excitement and despair left nothing for his trembling tongue to tell.

She did not swoon nor weep, but stood erect, as rigid and motionless as if turned to stone; only the questions which fell like drops of molten lead from her ashy lips—when, where, and how—so wrought upon the brain of the other that he answered them with a mechanical accuracy, as if under the pressure of the mesmeric trance.

Had she been of another temper, the shock might have turned her brain, and madness or death itself supervened; but her nature was too chastened and tender for such extremity. But her heart sank, with that profound, speechless, unutterable weight which comes to those whose power of resilience has received its death-blow. The tide of renewed health, which had been flowing through her veins, chilled and slackened; and the pulses, which had almost regained their former reg-

ular elastic beat, leaped and fluctuated and faltered down to tremor and feebleness.

That he had died by the visitation of God would have taxed her fortitude to its utmost reach, but still not have exceeded it; but that he had died at her hands—poisoned by her guilty kisses, because she had not courage to forego the sight of him when dying—the burden of that crime made life too hard to be borne.

She lived two years after the blow had fallen; but it was as much her death-blow as if it had killed her instantaneously.

The chief part of the time was spent in that weary search for health, in other lands, under warmer skies, which adds so much weariness and disappointment to the sad business of protracted dying; Miss Earle watching the sure decline with a heart of agony beneath her steadfast constancy.

As Honor's strength failed more and more, she implored to be taken home to Earlescourt, a request which was yielded to at once, with that facility which means that hope has died out even in our nearest and dearest. During the interval that remained to her of life, her sweetness and unselfishness, and constant care for others in their relations with herself, never failed, but rather shone brighter and brighter toward the perfect day. And with all these endearing qualities was mixed a humility infinitely pathetic, as of one self-condemned and utterly unworthy of the goodness of which she was the object.

A few weeks before her death she asked Adrian if he would do her one last service, in memory of the affection which had never failed between them.

"I would go to the ends of the earth for you, Honor," was his answer.

"I do not wish you to go quite so far as that," she said, with a little smile; "but go far enough to find Anna Methuen and bring her to me, that I may confess and win her pardon before I die. I think I cannot die unless——"

He had not much difficulty in his quest. Anna was again abroad, but this time Mrs. Auchester was her travelling companion; and Adrian, who found them at Mentone, was welcomed by that lady with a cordiality which he owed to her knowledge of the fact that he had been one of Philip Methuen's friends.

Adrian was sadly aware that, if he were to accomplish the object of his journey, he had no time to lose, and yet he felt an almost invincible repugnance to introduce or urge the matter upon Anna's hard and indifferent attention. At last he simply put it to her thus: "Honor was dying, and earnestly desired to see her once more. Would she not consent to come home?"

And then as he looked at her his heart and his glance quickened, and burning words of personal suasion and appeal rose to his tongue; but he kept them under, though not without difficulty. He had thought that, as their eyes encountered, a soft, crimson flush passed over the delicate, smooth pallor of Anna's cheek. But this was not the time to speak of love or hope.

"I will not come home," she answered, and her eyes darkened and narrowed as she spoke. "Honor Aylmer has been dying before to-day, and I would not save her life, or ease her mind, if I could do it by the lifting up of my right hand. Tell her to give me back what she took away—ah! you are cruel—I will not bear it! only say, she cannot be more miserable than I would have her."

Was he to go home with such a message as this, to crush the tender broken heart? In his perplexity and distress he applied to Lord Sainsbury, who had lately joined his party, knowing how very close and intimate the relations between him and Philip Methuen had been.

"I will speak to her," was Sainsbury's answer, when Adrian, with great delicacy and tact, had stated the case and besought his interference; "but it will probably have no effect, and—it was an action which needs great magnanimity to forgive. It made this world the poorer for a great many of us."

The next day he fulfilled his promise.

"Anna," he said, as they were pacing up and down the sea-wall together in the clear brightness of the early morning, "Adrian Earle told me last night the business which has brought him here. My dear, you must go back to England, for no other purpose than to give Honor Aylmer the forgiveness she wants."

Anna turned and looked at him, with her eyes full of confused anger and pain.

As he seemed to wait for her answer, she said at last, in a smothered voice: "You hurt me! do not speak of it. I will never forgive her!"

"You must forgive her!" he repeated. "You cannot let her go down into the grave unhappy—this woman above all others!"

"Above all other women, this is she whom I would make miserable in life or in death!" was her low-breathed answer. "You do not know!"

"I know more than you think, and can understand the state of your mind; but that devil's whisper must be disregarded. Do this thing as an act of grace to cover any sins of which your secret heart may be aware—as against your husband. We are all guilty of such, even toward those we love better than our life."

She made no answer, and for a few minutes they walked in silence; then he resumed: "We will all go home together. I, too, have found it hard to forgive, but—I understand—it is the sense of what she has done that has broken her heart. She gives her life as forfeit for his—can she do more?"

Anna yielded so far under this pressure as to consent to see Honor; and her changed aspect, both of body and mind, moved her more than she had believed possible. Her physical weakness and pathetic humility were such as to be exquisitely distasteful to Anna to witness, and she cut short the painful interview as much as possible.

"I will forgive you in a sense," she said, standing beside Honor's bed, in the magnificent vigor of her health and beauty; "but fully, with my heart in it, that is out of my power. The thought of him—struck down and dying—through you—in those few cruel days—is just to me now what it was then. But I will not curse you nor hate you—that is, for Philip's dear sake. Do not ask to see me any more."

A few days afterward Honor passed painlessly out of life, and as soon as the first shock of tender pain was over, Adrian resolved to throw himself once more into the excitement of adventurous travel. The look that he had seen in Anna's eyes when she had last spoken of Philip daunted him; if she would ever consent to come to him it would not be yet.

She was the last person to whom he went to make his adieux.

"You are really going away?" she asked. "For how long?" and she looked at him with her proud, direct gaze, in which there was not a touch of embarrassment.

"How long?" he answered; "forever, I think; that is—till you bid me come home."

She got up from her seat and began to walk slowly up and down the room after a habit she had adopted—it was the formal, colorless room of Skeffington Vicarage, almost unchanged from the hour when she had first beheld it.

Anna had never yet returned to Methuen Place; she said it would kill her to cross the threshold of the door and enter one of the familiar rooms.

Adrian sat and watched her in eager silence, thinking of the time, two years ago, when she had paced the floor as now, debating with her conscience and her heart. Then what he had dared to offer was shame, to be mitigated by love and revenge; now honor and bliss—the wine and roses of life—were in his gift, would she but believe it and put it to the proof. Even now, when hope had grown weary and impatient, was it possible that there was a chance for him: that the proud, pale, forlorn-looking woman—dearer and more beautiful than ever—was once more hesitating if she should accept his devotion?

He rose and approached her, his face alight with excitement.

"Stop!" she said, stepping back and putting her hands behind her, "let me speak first. You still love me, you poor Adrian? You would like me to promise that I would be your wife?" Her eyes looked straight into his, but there was no blush on her face.

"I have loved you, Anna," was his answer, "since the first hour we met in Methuen Park, and I shall love you to my last. Marry me if you will, but if you refuse no other woman shall ever be my wife."

"I will be your wife," she said, quite gravely and simply, "if you will have me on my own terms. I do not love you, but I am grateful to you for your faithfulness, and—I cannot live alone! They think I have forgotten, but—I have not forgotten! Often at nights I dash myself on the floor, and lie there weeping and groaning for Philip. He is before my eyes day and night, till I could cry out to be relieved of the thought of him." She put her hands before her eyes, and when she removed them he saw her cheeks were wet with tears. "I—I would forget Philip if I could," she added; "you will help me to do this?"

Adrian turned a little pale, and for a moment he hesitated. Then he looked at her again, and love conquered pain and misgiving. "What you offer me, Anna, is an ordeal that a man might well hesitate to accept; but I will risk it and take you, dear, even on your own hard terms. You have not spared my feelings." He did not approach her, though his heart yearned to take her at last into his arms, but continued to gaze at her with a touch of tender derision in his face.

His pride and reticence produced their effect. The color came into her cheek, and she averted her head.

"I have been too honest," she said; "you would have liked better to have been deceived. I ask you to take me and help me to conquer a pain I cannot bear, and by which I am worn out, but—you are not bound to help me, Adrian."

He was kneeling at her feet by this time with his arms about the tall, lithe, black-robed figure, and his face raised passionately to hers. "I am bound body and soul," he breathed. "I cannot help myself: kiss me this once, Anna, my own, at last!"

She sighed profoundly, and turned away her eyes from him, but without releasing herself from his embrace. Then slowly turning again toward him, she put both hands upon his shoulders, bowed her superb head, and touched his lips with hers.

THE END.

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